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NEW AND OLD (SERMONS),

A MONTHLY REPERTORY OF CATHOLIC PULPIT ELOQUENCE

EMBRACING

TWO SERMONS FOR EACH SUNDAY

AND

HOLY-DAY OF OBLIGATION

OF THE

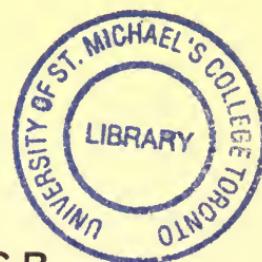
ECCLESIASTICAL YEAR.

EDITED,

(IN CONJUNCTION WITH MANY OTHER CLERGYMEN,)

BY

Rev. AUGUSTINE WIRTH, O.S.B.



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ST. MARY'S ABBEY,

NEWARK, N. J.

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REV. AUGUSTINE WIRTH, O.S.B.

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

THE FEAR OF THE GENERAL JUDGMENT.

“Men withering away for fear and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world. . . . But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your head, because your redemption is at hand.” (Luke 21: 26, 28.)

In the Gospel of to-day, my dear brethren, our Lord Jesus Christ, in prophesying the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, also foretells the end of the world and the general Judgment. He details the fearful signs which shall precede those final events, and which shall strike terror into all hearts. “Men withering away for fear and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world.” All men, indeed, shall fear, but not in the same degree, nor from the same cause. To a certain portion of mankind, our divine Lord then promises consolation, because, (as he says), “their salvation is at hand.” To the end, my brethren, that we may share in the precious consolation and salvation which shall be the eternal portion of those happy souls, and that we may not, in the end, wither away for fear, calling upon the mountains, “Fall upon us: and to the hills, cover us,” (Luke 23: 30), let us consider to-day :

I. *Who are those that shall fear at the last day? and*
 II. *What shall be the reason of their fear?*

I. *They shall wither away for fear.* Who?

I. *The wicked.* Faith teaches us that no man can escape the general Judgment, and that *that* fearful day is “the day of the Lord, great and very terrible, when all things that are done, God will bring into judgment for every error, whether it be good or evil” (Eccles. 12: 14). Alas! my brethren, what will be the feelings of those who shall appear before that strict tribunal, reprobate sinners, bowed down under their heavy burden of mortal guilt? “The heavens shall reveal his iniquity” (Job 20: 27), and the darkest and most hidden crimes shall then come forth to the open light of day. He whom we have offended, will be our Judge. As a sign of his wrath, “a fire shall go before him, and shall burn his enemies round about” (Ps. 96: 3). In that day, the sinner can expect no mercy, no pardon; the time for both is past; it is a “judgment without mercy.” (James 2: 13.) “I will revenge me on my enemies,” says the Judge himself; “and although I was formerly a

‘merciful and gracious God’ (2 Esdr. 9: 3), I will now become a God and a Lord of revenge.” For this reason, the prophet calls this day “a day of wrath,” “a day of tribulation and distress,” “a day of calamity and misery,” “a day of darkness and obscurity,” “a day of clouds and whirlwinds.” (Soph. 1: 15.) The bare thought of these things has sometimes sufficed to alarm the most reckless sinners; and if they tremble to think upon this dreadful day, how much more shall they be terrified when they experience in person all the agony of its actual horrors. “They shall wither away for fear.”

2. Shall not *the good and pious* also fear at the Last Day? Ah! no, my dear Christians, although their pure souls shall be filled with awe, the terrible omens of the approaching judgment will be for the just not signs of terror, but rather, of consolation. Then, shall they recall those comforting words of our Saviour: “But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads, because your redemption is at hand;” and their conscience shall bear joyful testimony of the happiness in store for them. They know that they have a Judge who can neither be bribed by infernal accusers, nor deceived by false witnesses. “When God is the Judge,” says St. Augustine, “no other witness is needed but thine own conscience.” Where this Judge and this Witness are concerned there is nothing to be feared but the record of a man’s own actions. The very severity of the judgment, the very justice of the Judge (“who will render to every man according to his works.”) shall prove for the just the foundations of their consolation. Whoever, with the Apostle, can truly say: “I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith,” can also say with him, with equal confidence: “For the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just Judge, will render to me at that day.” (2 Tim. 4: 7, 8.) While the godless, before the bar of Christ, shall wither away for fear, the righteous shall stand firm in the blessed security of their unwavering confidence. The sun may be darkened, and the moon refuse to give her light, the stars may fall from their orbits, the powers of heaven be moved, and the whole firmament convulsed with terror, but the elect of God shall have no cause for fear. For when all these things begin to come to pass, terrible as they are in themselves, the just shall recognize them only as tokens of their own approaching everlasting reward.

II. “They shall wither away for fear and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world.” What shall come at the Last Day?

1. *The impeachment, and*
2. *The sentence of all mankind.*

1. The conscience of every man must be eventually the witness of his good, or the accuser of his evil, deeds. "Remember, O sinner," says St. Bernard, "that you will be charged with many and grievous offences. You will be reproached, not with few or trifling faults, but with innumerable and grave vices. The examination will not be a short one, but will include the record of your whole life. Hidden sins will then come to light, and perhaps still more grievous ones than you now perceive." "I will reprove thee and set before thy face" (Ps. 49: 21), will the divine Judge say to the convicted sinner. And what shall the unhappy creature do in those sad circumstances? Shall God, perhaps, hear his cry, when this trouble shall overtake him? "No," says St. Bernard, "all avenues shall be closed to the sinner. He shall be able neither to deny nor excuse his evil deeds. He shall neither flee, nor appeal, to a higher Judge. Expecting no pardon, it will be impossible for him to escape his doom." "Tribulation shall terrify him, and distress shall surround him." (Job 15: 24.) Above him, shall sit the severe and angry Judge; under his feet, shall yawn the deep abyss of hell. Interiorly tormented by the gnawings of conscience, he shall be exteriorly terrified by the sight of a world in flames. His sins, on one side, shall be his accusers; on the other, shall appear the devil, his pitiless tormentor. Even the holy angels, in the fulfilment of God's will, must unite in driving him down into hell; whilst the saints, as spectators, approve of the solemn sentence of the Judge.

2. And what shall *that sentence* be? "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matt. 25: 41.) Words of thunder, most terrible is their significance! St. Bonaventure explains to us the meaning and details of this awful sentence. First comes *the separation from God*: "Depart from me." Second, *the curse*: "Depart from me, ye cursed." Third, *the imprisonment*, which is denoted by the little word "into." Fourth, *the severity of the punishment*: "into fire." Fifth, *the eternity of the punishment*: "into everlasting fire." And sixth and last, *the companionship of the devils*: "which was prepared for the devil and his angels." This sentence once pronounced is irrevocable, and he who executes it is inexorable. Scarcely has the judgment been pronounced, before the condemned is dragged down to eternal punishment. O heavens! what horrors will overwhelm the evil-doer when he hears upon all sides: "Away with the sinner into hell!" "The wicked shall be turned into hell; all the nations that forget God." (Ps. 9: 18.) Shall not the reprobate wither away for fear and expectation of that which shall come upon them?

Peroration.—O my dearly beloved! these truths are sufficiently

important to penetrate into the inmost core of our hearts. I do not think it necessary to enlarge upon their horrible details. Each one must decide for himself whether, on the day of judgment, he shall belong to that unhappy multitude who have cause to fear, or whether he shall be among the glorious throng to whom our Saviour, to-day, addresses the consoling words : "When these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads," etc. Of this, each one's conscience must be the judge. In the meanwhile, since we all must appear before the tribunal of Christ to give a strict account of our works, let us so live that we may not dread that fearful judgment, but look forward to it with joy, and even with ardent desire. "Does the grain fear that it will not be gathered into the barn?" says St. Augustine ; "or do the sheep trouble themselves for fear that they should not stand upon the right hand?" They not only do not fear or trouble themselves lest this should happen, but they look forward to it with longing and impatience. How happy shall we be if, in the eyes of God, we are such good wheat that the angels shall gather us into the heavenly barns ; or such good sheep as those to whom the good Shepherd on that day shall say : "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" ! Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

SOLICITUDE FOR ETERNAL SALVATION.

“But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads ; because your redemption is at hand” (Luke 21 : 28).

Our Lord, in the Gospel of this day, directs our attention to the end of the world and the Last Judgment. He speaks of the terrible signs which shall then appear in the heavens, when the light of the sun shall grow dim, the moon shall no longer give her light, the stars shall fall from the firmament, and the world shall be covered with more than Egyptian darkness ; and of those other signs which shall then appear upon the earth—of the violent disturbance of the sea, of the distress of nations, and the withering away of men through fear. All these things warn us to enter upon the new Ecclesiastical Year with serious thoughts, and to profit by this season of grace for the advancement of our eternal interests. “When these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads, because your redemption is at hand.” “Brethren, now is the hour for us to rise from sleep : for now our salvation is nearer than when we believed. The night is passed, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light” (Rom. 13: 11-12).

In the natural year, spring, summer, autumn, and winter follow each other in visible and endless succession ; so, also, the ecclesiastical year revolves in a mysterious orbit, elevating and consecrating the various seasons by its graces and blessings. We are thus doubly warned and invited to sanctify ourselves and to travel onward to our heavenly goal. Yet, for vast numbers, these merciful dispensations of Providence are profitless. Time passes, the years, months, and days rush swiftly by, and there is no growth in virtue, no progress in holiness, to be discerned in their souls. How many years have *you*, my brethren, already spent without gaining any thing for eternal life ! Far from increasing in merit, your sins and vices, perhaps, have rendered you utterly bankrupt in divine grace. Most justly, then, does the Apostle exhort us, to-day, “to cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light ;” and, to the end that you profit by his warnings, and those of the present Gospel, I will explain to you that the care for your salvation is,

- I. The most necessary ;*
- II. The most sublime ; and*
- III. The sweetest duty of our life.*

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

I. The care of our soul is the most necessary duty of our life.

1. All the other cares which engross our attention, have reference to the perishable things of this earthly life. But can you name to me a care or a duty as pressing and important as that of our eternal salvation? All other cares are but transient, superficial, trivial; the care of our souls involves our deepest and holiest interests, the decision of our lot for all eternity. Before many years, this body of ours, the object of so much solicitude, which we feed and clothe so carefully, will return to dust. The goods and joys of life are as glittering dust, which will be swept away by the storm preceding the General Judgment, and which is of no value in the eyes of God and his Saints. The friends and relatives whose well-being is very near our heart, are little more than transient acquaintances whom we meet and part from at a wayside inn, bidding them farewell after a short greeting. "I have seen all things that are done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit." (Eccles. 1: 14.) Our souls will not die nor decay. Their eternal happiness or misery depends on the care or carelessness we manifest in their regard. Is there then a greater necessity than to care for our immortal soul?

2. *This affair cannot be neglected without incurring the greatest damage.* Many evils may attend the neglect or careless conduct of our earthly affairs, but temporal calamities are rarely irremediable or utterly barren of good. There is scarcely any earthly calamity which can not either be repaired or soon forgotten. You may win back lost possessions, or gain still larger ones. Other and better friends may take the place of those whose loss you mourn; and the most delicate health may be restored. All temporal things may be given back to man, or he can console himself for their loss with the hope of higher possessions in the future. But if, through indifference, your soul is once lost, *all is lost—AND LOST FOREVER!* Nothing can compensate you for this loss or misery. Not a single moment of the time wasted in any other occupation than in the care of our souls, will be given back to us a second time. He who has not saved his soul for everlasting life in the short span allotted to him, is cast out into exterior darkness. He is a branch cut off from the vine to be thrust into the fire. Like the foolish virgins, he stands without a nuptial chamber whose door shall never open to him. As in the case of the unprofitable servant, the talent buried by him, is delivered into the hand of another. Is there any other care on which such momentous interests depend?

3. *This care admits of no delay and of no substitute.* Time flies with lightning speed, and we should not waste a single hour of it. That

which is put off, is already lost. What is neglected to-day, cannot be recovered to-morrow. There is no to-morrow, or the next day ; there is only to-day and now. Neither can you employ a substitute in this matter. I, myself,—you, yourselves,—must care for the immortal soul God has given each one of us. Though you possessed a long retinue of servants, though you claimed command over thousands, not one or all of that great army of subordinates could relieve you of this important duty. No friend, on earth or in heaven, can take your place in this momentous concern.

4. *What does the Sacred Scripture say of this necessary care?* “Martha, Martha ! thou art careful, and art troubled about many things. But one thing is necessary.” (Luke 10 : 41-42.) Martha is fulfilling the holy duties of hospitality to Christ himself, yet he says to her : “*But one thing is necessary.*” “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ?” (Matt. 8 : 33.) Alas ! where are those who daily put the question to themselves : “What shall I do, that I may have life everlasting ?” (Matt. 19 : 16.)

II. *The care of our soul is not only the most necessary, but also the most sublime business and duty of our life.*

1. *What is the value of the soul in the eyes of the world?* In the judgment of the world, *a soul is of little or no worth*. Countless myriads of men go through life in poverty and want, covered with miserable rags. The world passes them contemptuously by. In great armies, they are led to battle, and a cannon-ball mows down whole ranks of them, as a scythe mows down the grass of the field. Millions, again, are bound in the chains of slavery, and are only prized, like animals, for their physical beauty or strength. Hundreds and thousands are employed in the unwholesome air of mills and factories, which slowly, but surely, poisons their lives, that others may live in ease and luxury, or that the capital of employers may be increased. My God ! of what worth is a man in the eyes of the world ? A valueless creature,—he is made still more wretched by the ruin which sin brings on his soul. For a transitory pleasure, for the gratification of a sensual lust, some men are as ready to sell their souls to the devil, as Judas was to sell his Lord and Master for thirty pieces of silver.

2. *But what is a human soul in the eyes of God?* A jewel of such value that human reason cannot comprehend it.

(a.) From all eternity, the soul of man was the object of God’s thoughts. *He made her according to his own image and likeness* ; for which reason, she surpasses in beauty and dignity all visible things.

He built the universe for her, to lead her, as a queen, into her own palace. All visible things are assigned to her service.

(b.) *The Son of God left the glory of his Father, became man, and embraced a life of poverty and suffering for the sake of our soul.* He shed his precious blood to cleanse her from sin. For her, he established his Church, and dwells day and night in the most holy Sacrament of the Altar, as an unceasing renewal of his love for her.

(c.) *The Holy Ghost has consecrated the human soul as his temple, in order to make his abode in her with the Father and the Son.* He has adorned her with the richest gifts of his grace ; he descends into her in a sevenfold stream, enlightening her with the beams of his wisdom. He is her counsellor and her strength. He supports and protects the Church from error, so that she may continue her efficacy for the salvation of mankind to the end of time.

(d.) As if this were not enough, God, so to say, moves the heavens, that he may save our soul, his beloved bride, for whose protection he sends down the blessed spirits. *He gives her the name of a saint, whom he appoints to watch over her as her patron ; and, finally, he commits her to the care of a guardian angel.* Could God do more in order to show us the value of our soul ?

3. *And what value does the devil set upon a human soul ?* He is willing to pay a big price for it ; he is willing to give for her all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them.

4. *And what do men think of the soul so highly prized by God and the evil one ?* Alas ! how foolishly the great mass of men act ! They live as if they had no souls. They exchange that priceless treasure for the perishable things of this world, for a handful of barley and a piece of bread, for a sinful enjoyment. They barter away the bride of heaven, intrusted to their care, for the gratification of a base passion.

III. *The care of our soul, through the mercy of God, is, at the same time, both light and sweet.* Convinced as we are of the value of our soul, *no sacrifice should be too great, no labor too hard*, if it is for her salvation. But the Lord has made the care, for our soul, easy and sweet. “Come to me, all you that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.” . . . “My yoke is sweet, and my burden is light.” (Matt. 11 : 28, 30.) He calls his service and the care for the salvation of our soul, *a burden and a yoke*, but he declares, as well, that joy and delight will be the portion of him who loves this burden, and carries this yoke cheerfully, unto the end.

1. *What does the Lord require from us that we may save our soul ?*

(a.) *A firm and living faith in his holy word*, announced by his own divine lips, or by the mouth of his infallible Church. Is this a sacrifice too great and oppressive? Is not faith the light of life, and our strength in every difficulty and trial? Is it not our hope and consolation in the dark and bitter hour of death? Faith beautifies our life, and pours heavenly peace into our hearts. How miserable and wretched we should be if deprived of this light and balm! Must we not exclaim with St. Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." (John 6: 69.)

(b.) *God commands us to love him with our whole heart, with our whole soul, and with all our strength.* Is this difficult or impossible? Is he not the supreme Being, and the best of Fathers? Is he not the most amiable Being, worthy of all our affections? And are we not happy in his love?

(c.) *He commands us to keep the commandments.* "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." (Matt. 19: 17.) They are the foundation of our happiness, here and hereafter. And if some commandments involve a sacrifice, is not every sacrifice made for the love of God, the source of new joys?

2. *Christ himself has done the greater part of the work of our salvation.* "I will come and heal him," said he to the Centurion who implored him to speak only a word from a distance for the cure of his servant. "I myself will come and heal her," said the Son of God, when he was about to deliver our soul from sin and perdition. And he has healed her by fulfilling for us the entire law, so that nothing more is left for us than to partake of his merits. "He that spared not even his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how hath he not also, with him, given us all things" (Rom. 8: 32)? What there is yet left to be done, the Lord will help us to accomplish by giving us his grace; and fortified by that grace, we may exclaim with St. Paul: "I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me." (Phil. 4: 13.)

3. *Furthermore, our Lord has solemnly promised that he will give an eternal reward for every effort made through love of him.* "He that shall persevere to the end, he shall be saved." (Mt. 10: 32.) "To him that overcometh, I will give the hidden manna." (Apoc. 2: 17.) No labor done, no sacrifice made for God and the salvation of our soul, is vain or fruitless. "Our present tribulation which is momentary and light, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory." (2 Cor. 4: 17, 18.) What will men not do in hope of reward? And how seldom is the promised reward worthy of the toil that purchases it! The sea hides in its bosom a mighty ruin of shipwrecked treasures; but the ocean of human life conceals in its depths still

vaster wrecks of disappointed hopes and fruitless labors. Men never weary of launching their frail bark on the same treacherous sea ; but no matter what loss or ruin may come to temporal things, God never deceives the hopes of man in the matter of his soul's salvation.

When Jacob had served Laban, his father-in-law, for a long time, he approached him and said : "Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how great thy possession hath been in my hands. It is reasonable, therefore, that I should now provide also for my own house." (Gen. 30 : 29, 30.) Let this be the sentiment wherewith you enter into the New Year : "Many, many years have I served the world and sin. It is reasonable, that I should now provide also for my own house." Yes, it is time for us all to love God and care for our immortal soul. Amen.

BISHOP EHRLER.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

THE THREE-FOLD FAITH.

“When John had heard in prison the works of Christ, sending two of his disciples, he said : Art thou he that art to come, or look we for another ?” (Matthew 11 : 2.)

My dearly beloved, why does John send two of his disciples to Christ to ask him : “Art thou he that art to come, or look we for another ?” Is his question prompted by a want of knowledge, or does he, perhaps, doubt that Christ is “He that is to be sent, and who is the expectation of nations”—? (Gen. 49 : 10.) No, the Baptist did not instruct his disciples to ask this question because he did not know the Messiah ; for he himself, in the presence of many people, had already pointed him out, saying : “Behold the Lamb of God,” “Behold him who taketh away the sins of the world.” He, also, had heard with his own ears the testimony of the Eternal Father, when the divine Dove of the Spirit descended on Christ after His Baptism in the Jordan, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” But, as our Saviour once asked where Lazarus was buried, not because he did not know, but in order that those who pointed out the grave, seeing its dead occupant raised to life, might be converted to the true faith—so, St. John sent his followers to Christ that, beholding his wonderful signs and miracles, they might be brought to believe in him. The holy Precursor knew that there is a three-fold faith which, as it were, by steps, leads up the faithful soul to God.

- I. *The faith inspired by heavenly signs and miracles ;*
- II. *The faith begotten of the divine Commandments ; and*
- III. *The faith grounded upon the divine promises.*

I. Through the *faith of miracles*, my beloved brethren, we believe in a God whose almighty power can effect these, and still greater, wonders.

I. “Without faith, it is impossible to please God,” (Hebr. 11 : 6,) says the Apostle. He then, who aspires to the divine love and favor, must believe that there is a God, a supreme and all-wise Deity, who will reward the good and punish the wicked. How can we know and believe all this ? Through the signs and miracles of the God-Man. “The works themselves which I do, give testimony of me, that the Father hath sent me.” (John 5 : 36.) These divine works are the

ground of our faith, for without them, the Christian's belief would be nothing but credulity. Hence, our Saviour himself says : " If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though you will not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in the Father." (John 10 : 37, 38.) As though he would declare in other words : In performing all these works and miracles, my dear children, my only motive is to furnish you with a secure foundation for your faith.

2. The marvels which a man beholds with his own eyes, are a guarantee for other and greater wonders which he does not see. Reason thus convinces him : If God can effect this one great miracle, he can most assuredly do all things. It is not by words that our Saviour, in the Gospel of to-day, answers the disciples of John, but by pointing to the works he wrought. To the question : " Art thou he that art to come ? " he did not answer " I am he," but, " Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." If he had merely answered : " I am he," the followers of John might have echoed in thought, at least, if not in word, the frequent reproach of the Scribes and Pharisees : " Thou givest testimony of thyself." (John 8 : 13.) A man's works not only assert what he is, but also prove that their testimony is true. The testimony of Christ's wonderful works, my brethren, is as convincing a proof of his divinity to us now, as it was to the disciples of John. It was on this account, I imagine, that our Saviour commanded those messengers of the Baptist to relate to him what they had heard, as well as what they had seen : " Go, and relate to John what you have heard and seen." Yes ! my Lord and my God !— " Faith cometh by hearing," " Thy testimonie are become to me exceedingly credible," (Ps. 92 : 5) ; and I believe in thee just as firmly now, when I only hear and read these things, as I would have believed if present with the Jews of old at the actual working of thy miracles !

II. Faith is begotten of the divine Commandments. To believe in God means :

1. *To hope in Him ; and*
2. *To love Him.*

1. *Faith can as little exist without hope, as a building can stand without a foundation.* For why, my brethren, do we believe in God, if not because " we look for that life which God will give to those that never change their faith from him "? (Tob. 2 : 18.) The Psalmist was

inspired from heaven, when he declared : “ It is good for me to adhere to my God, to put my hope in the Lord God.” (Ps. 72 : 27.) If we adhere to God, we believe in God. And this faith is justly called *the faith of the commandments*, since we can neither depend upon him nor fix our hopes upon him unless we keep his commandments. Divine faith and hope are thus so closely united together, that they are often expressed by the one simple word—faith—as in that text of the Wise Man, which so beautifully and truthfully exhorts the Christian to “ believe God, and he will recover thee,” immediately adding : “ And direct thy way and trust in him ; ” (Eccles. 2 : 6)—that is : Keep all his commandments, and then thou shalt have an assured right to hope.

2. *Divine love*, my dear brethren, *is as inseparable as hope from true Christian faith*. This, our Saviour shows clearly enough, when he rebukes the Jews, saying : “ Why call you me Lord, Lord ; and do not the things which I say ? ” (Luke 6 : 46) ; implying by these words : “ You have, it is true, the faith founded upon miracles, but you have not yet the faith founded upon the observance of the commandments. My works testify to you that I am the Son of God, and that I am invested with divine power ; but you do not yet appear to believe that I have the power to command your obedience. You believe in me, but you do not, as yet, love me ; otherwise you would do what I command you ; ‘ If any one love me, he will keep my word.’ ” (John 14 : 23.)

III. Our faith, in order to be efficacious, *must be grounded upon the divine promises*. We believe in God,

1. *Because he has promised us eternal life, and*
2. *Because he always performs what he promises.*

1. God commands us nothing without attaching a great reward to our obedience. Now, *what greater reward could he promise than the assurance of eternal life to those that believe in him?* How often, my brethren, has he not repeated to us this promise ? “ For God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting.” (John 3 : 16.) And further : “ Amen, amen, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath everlasting life ; and cometh not into judgment, but is passed from death to life.” (John 5 : 24.) Again : “ He that believeth in me, although he be dead, shall live ; and every one that liveth, and believeth in me shall not die forever.” (John 11 : 25-26.) Yes, he even goes so far as to say : “ This is life everlasting ; that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” (John 17 : 3.) If we seriously consider these blessed, life-giving promises, my dearly beloved, shall we

not dismiss all our invisible, idle, useless cares, and earnestly and zealously establish all our hopes upon these sure and gracious foundations? That in which we are chiefly lacking is *a faith grounded upon hope*, to which the Wise Man exhorts us when he says: "Believe God, and he will recover thee." (Eccles. 2:6.)

2. If we examine more closely these sacred promises which are the foundations of our faith, *we shall not find the least cause to doubt their happy fulfilment*. "If he had promised to us that which was difficult or impossible of execution," says St. Bernard, "it would be allowable for us to choose another basis for our hopes; but to him, all things are possible by the power of his word only, and what can be easier than this?" Who shall dare cite a single instance wherein God has been unfaithful to his promise? The Wise Man challenges the whole world to deny the fact, when he cries out to the doubting multitude: "Know ye that no one hath hoped in the Lord, and hath been confounded." (Eccles. 2:11.) "Who is it," says St. Augustine, "of whom one is accustomed to say, that he has been 'confounded'? He who can truly say: 'That which I have hoped for, I have not received.'" But when has this happened? When you have founded your hopes upon yourself, or upon some other creature. Then, you will be confounded; then, your hopes will be disappointed; then, you will incur that terrible malediction of divine wrath: "Cursed be the man who puts his trust in creatures." But, because the groundwork of divine hope is so certain, and the tie so close that unites it to faith, the Apostle says of faith itself: "And whosoever believeth in him, shall not be confounded." (Rom. 9:33.) This, again, my brethren, is no other than that faith of which we have already spoken, and which St. Bernard denominates *the faith founded upon the promises of God*.

Peroration.—Dearest Saviour! we no longer ask thee, in union with the disciples of John, "Art thou he that art to come, or look we for another?" We say rather with Nicodemus: "Rabbi, we know that thou art come a teacher from God; for no man can do these miracles which thou doest, unless God was with him." (John 3:2.) We are not only convinced in our hearts of these incontestable truths of faith which thou hast revealed to us, but we will profess them with our mouths and works all the days of our lives. We do not wish to be ranked among those who "confess that they know God, but in their deeds, they deny him." (Titus 1:16.) Ah! no, my brethren, our works shall, with the help of divine grace, accord with the belief of our hearts; and then our faith will prove no more an empty, unprofitable profession of the lips, but, "supported by hope," will be the true faith "which worketh by charity." (Gal. 5:6.) Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

WHAT JESUS SAYS OF HIMSELF : AND WHAT HE SAYS OF JOHN.

“Art thou he that art to come, or do we look for another ?” (Matt. 11: 3.)

John the Baptist was cast into prison because he had dared to speak the truth ; and you know, truth begets hatred, and hatred, persecution and injustice of every description. He had said to the incestuous Herod : “ It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife.” It has always been so, and it is so to-day. Speak the truth, and you will make enemies. Yet, even in prison, John endeavors to promote the glory of Jesus and the salvation of his (John’s) disciples, of whom, it seems, many would not believe in Jesus. Although he had pointed out Christ in these words : “ Behold the Lamb of God ; behold him that taketh away the sins of the world,” (declaring publicly that Jesus must *increase*, and he *decrease*,) and had done every thing to detach his disciples from himself and lead them to Jesus, yet, had recourse to another expedient, sending two of them to Jesus, that they might hear from his own lips, and see by his works, that he was the Messias. They ask him, as messengers of their master : “ Art thou he that art to come, or do we look for another ?”

John himself did not doubt the divinity of Christ, or his dignity as the Messiah, but some of his disciples had yet to be assured on this point. And it is, therefore, not for his own, but for their sake, that he sent two of his disciples to Jesus, in order that Christ might teach them and strengthen their faith. Let us hear

I. What Jesus says of himself ; and
II. What he says of John.

I. What does Jesus say of himself ?

I. Go, and relate to John what you have heard and seen.

We might naturally expect that Christ would have answered directly to the question of John’s disciples : Yes, I am he that is to come ; I am Christ, the Son of God, the promised Redeemer of the world. Those messengers had already heard of the wonderful works of Jesus, and witnessed them with their own eyes, because in their presence he healed all manner of sicknesses and bodily infirmities. To these miracles, he appeals ; they must give testimony of his divine mission and dignity.

Jesus did not content himself with saying, “ I am he that is to come.”

Of what avail would it have been to repeat what John himself had publicly confessed? But he appealed at once to his works, as proofs of his being the Messias: "Go, and relate to John what you have heard and seen. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the dead rise again." Jesus refers in these words to the prophecy of Isaias (35: 4): "God himself will come and save you. Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall be free." This prophecy was one of those known to every Israelite. The argument of Jesus is this: The miracles foretold by Isaias are now performed by me; consequently, God himself is come to save you.

2. The disciples of John were kindly received by Jesus. He is desirous, also, of hearing *our* petitions whenever we present them to him with faith and confidence; he even encourages us to come to him for relief in all our necessities. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you," (Matt. 7: 7); and he assures us by a solemn oath that if we ask any thing in his name, we shall obtain the purport of our prayer: "Amen, amen, I say to you: If you ask the Father any thing in my name, he will give it you." (John, 16: 23.) "Come to me all you that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you." (Matt. 11: 23.)

Jesus describes another characteristic feature by which he is to be recognized as the Messias, in the following words: "*The poor have the Gospel preached to them.*" The Jews knew that the Messias would be most revered, and his preaching most listened to, by the poor and humble. Isaias had foretold: "The Spirit of God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me; he hath sent me to preach to the meek, to heal the contrite heart." (Is. 16: 1.) Indeed, with a few exceptions, it was the poor, as regards earthly goods, who followed Jesus, and listened to his good tidings. Those rich persons who seek their consolation in perishable things, are unwilling to hear the Gospel preached to them, because it speaks more of the contempt of the world, and of solicitude for heavenly things, than they are willing to hear. Three hundred years elapsed before an emperor was converted. True, Christ had some adherents among the rich, but those rich men who followed Jesus, such as Zaccheus, Joseph of Arimathea, had their hearts detached from their riches. Thus, there are, to-day, rich nobles and princes, foremost among zealous Catholics, who do not set their hearts and affections on the goods of this world, but make use of their riches for the glory of God and the salvation of their fellow-men; who make earthly riches give way to the riches of eternity. Whether we be rich or poor in temporal goods, we must be poor in spirit, else the Gospel

will be preached to us, not for our salvation, but for our condemnation. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5: 3.)

4. "*Blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in me.*" He warns them and all men, not to despise him on account of his poverty, or of his death on the cross. Those who behold in him only his human nature, are scandalized in him, and refuse to adore as their God him who was looked upon as a carpenter's son, and died the ignominious death of the cross. His poverty, humility, sufferings, and death, his doctrine of mortification and self-denial, were foolishness to the Gentiles, and a stumbling block to the Jews ; hence, they refused to believe in him. But neither Jew nor Gentile had any reason for being scandalized. Had they considered the prophecies fulfilled in him, the innocence of his life, the divine character of his doctrine, and the many miracles wrought by him, they would then have been no longer scandalized, but confessed him to be both God and man ; and his humiliation and lowliness would have induced them to admire his infinite mercy and goodness, and to love him the more. Alas ! there are many among us who are scandalized, if not at the person, at the doctrine of Jesus ; *viz.* the proud, the avaricious, the envious, the unchaste, and all who hate self-denial and mortification. To them, the doctrine is too austere and rigorous ; therefore, they either reject it altogether, or interpret it in such a way as to make it harmonize with their passions and inclinations. What blindness and infatuation ! We shall be judged not by the maxims of the world and the flesh, but by the Gospel of Christ.

II. *When they went their way, Jesus began to say to the multitude, concerning John, that they might not form an unfavorable opinion of him, as though his faith in him were shaken.* He therefore reminds the Jews of the purpose for which they had thronged into the desert, and of the overwhelming impression which the appearance of John had left on their minds, leaving them to infer the obvious conclusion that a man of John's character would not be likely to waver in his faith.

1. *What went you into the desert to see ? A reed shaken by the wind ?* You did not see in John an unstable man. He was immovable as a rock. He did not lack the courage to remind soldiers and kings of their duty. Although he saw prison and death before him, he said to Herod : "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife."

We, also, must be strong in avoiding evil and doing good, and in the performance of our duty. We must not be shaken with the wind, but whenever occasion offers, defend the honor of Jesus, and our faith in

him. "Fear not those that kill the body, and cannot kill the soul; but rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matt. 10: 28.)

2. "*But what went ye out to see? a man clothed in soft garments?* Behold they that are clothed in soft garments are in the houses of kings." After having reminded the multitude of the steadiness of character which they had witnessed in John, he reminded them of his mortified life. John was an angel in human flesh, and yet he lived as the most rigorous penitent. His place of habitation from his childhood was the desert; his clothing consisted of coarse material, of camel's hair, with a leathern girdle about his loins; his food was locusts and wild honey; and his sermon was: "Do penance; for the kingdom of God is at hand." (Matt. 2:2.) How admirable is this mortification in a man who never committed a mortal sin! And we, who from our childhood's days have so often and so grievously offended God, shun every mortification, deny ourselves nothing, and complain of every, even the least, inconvenience.

Christ and his Apostles detested pride and luxury in any form. In our days, extravagance in dress, (far from being confined to the houses of kings) has spread among all classes of people. We should, however, never forget that, of all the virtues of John, Jesus *most* extols his mortification.

3. "*But what went ye out to see? a prophet? Yea, I tell you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: Behold I will send my angel before thy face who shall prepare the way before thee.*" The people knew that John was a prophet, for the miraculous circumstances of his birth were divulged over all the mountainous country of Judea. (Luke 1: 65.) Therefore, multitudes went out to him into the desert where he was preaching. Jesus confirms this general belief that John was a prophet, and more than a prophet, because he not only foretold Christ, but pointed directly to him, immediately prepared the way for him, and baptized him.

Jesus calls John an angel, not only because he was his messenger, but also because of his virginity and of his mortification, since he used an invisible rather than a visible meat and drink; he was an angel sent to minister to those who shall receive the inheritance of salvation.

John was sent by God to prepare the way of the Messias. Holy Christmas is at hand, when our Lord will come again into the heart of every one. Let us prepare his way before him; especially, by a sincere and contrite confession of our sins.

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

VIRGINITY.

“Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.” (Matt. 1: 16.)

To-day, we commemorate the feast of immaculate Virgin ; yes, of a Virgin from whom Virginity itself derived its worth. In the Old Law, the human race was commanded to increase and multiply ; hence, the Jews held it as a sacred duty to marry ; and it was considered a disgrace in a woman to be barren. But since Virginity has been associated with maternity, in the person of Mary, the former has been more esteemed than the marriage state itself. We can not, indeed, deny this truth ; but yet there are young men and women who act as if the only joy in life was to have an opportunity of marriage. To-day, I shall endeavor to prove to such that the state of Virginity is truly

- I. *More honorable in the sight of God ; and*
- II. *Far happier for man, than that of marriage.*

I. Let us estimate the worth of the state of virginity.

1. From the decisions of God ; and
2. From those of his Saints.

I. “No price,” says the Sacred Writer, “is worthy of a continent soul.” (Eccles. 26: 20.) Man has an immortal soul, like the Angels, and a mortal body, like the beasts. When he restrains his carnal and animal passions, he becomes like the Angels. God is a pure Spirit ; man is the image of God. The more man restrains himself from impure things, the more closely does he approach the likeness of his Maker and his God. “My beloved to me and I to him, who feedeth among the lilies,” (Cant. 2: 16,) says the bride in the Song of Solomon ; meaning thereby, that, since the lily is the symbol of purity, God dwells only with the pure of heart. Why did not our Saviour appear first as a full-grown man (rather than as a little child), so that, from the beginning of his earthly life, he might enter upon his office of preacher ? Because our Saviour wished to be the son of a Virgin. He esteemed so highly the state of virginity that he was willing to postpone the work of redemption, and assume the helplessness of infancy, only that he might be the

son of a Virgin. "Rejoice at this, O ye holy youths," says St. Augustine, "who, in order to follow Christ, have refrained yourselves from marriage. For he whom you follow, has not come to you by the road of ordinary marriage, so that you may learn to despise marriage through which you have come into the world. Rejoice! ye holy virgins; a virgin has brought forth him, whom, without damage to your virginity, you must espouse."

2. How highly the Blessed Virgin esteemed Virginity is clearly shown by her conduct and conversation when the angelic Messenger saluted her. "She was troubled at his saying, and thought with herself, what manner of salutation this should be." (Luke 1:29.) Out of love of Virginity, she remained solitary in her chamber, so that she could neither see nor hold converse with man. The angel, appearing, said to her: "Blessed art thou among women;" and she was frightened at this greeting, because she would rather have been blessed among virgins. She answered him: "How shall this be done, because I know not man?" From these words, St. Augustine concludes that she had already taken a vow of virginity. She was anxious regarding her dearest treasure of chastity; and, as is the manner of true virgins, she feared, although she had no cause for fear. Following her glorious example, thousands of holy virgins of both sexes have ever held virginity in such high estimation, that they were even ready to sacrifice their lives rather than surrender that precious jewel. It would occupy too much time if I should attempt to cite the innumerable examples whereby the Church and the cloister confirm the truth of this statement. The history of the holy virgins, St. Agnes, St. Cecilia, St. Ursula, St. Dorothea, and hundreds of others, is well known to you. You also know the struggles of Sts. Benedict, Ignatius, Aloysisius, and many others, in their efforts to preserve unsullied this beautiful virtue of holy purity. You have frequently heard what the ancient Fathers, especially St. Jerome and St. Augustine, have written in praise of virginity. And, lastly, you may recall the vast army of religious who, since the foundation of their orders, have sought refuge in the cloister, in order to persevere in this holy state of virginity. That they have been far more happy in their choice than if they had married, I shall now proceed to prove to you.

II. Man is far happier in the state of virginity than in that of marriage, both as regards :

1. *His soul*; and
2. *His body*.

1. In the state of virginity, one can attend to the affairs of his salvation, far more easily and peacefully. "The unmarried woman and the

virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit. But she that is married, thinketh on the things of the world, how she may please her husband." (1 Cor. 7: 34.) How many cares surround the married man, when he sees around him his wife and children, whom he must provide for and support in their manifold necessities. To this end, he must devote himself constantly to temporal things ; and doing this, it is almost impossible that he should not fall into sins of anger, blasphemy, dishonesty, and other similar vices. Here, there are troublesome, unruly children ; there, the relatives of either party cause disturbance ; again, the consideration of the details and necessary expenses of a household arouses disquietude, or inordinately absorbs the attention. The mother is worn out with cooking, sewing, or the constant care of sickly children ; and if, in the midst of it all, the husband comes home with some friends, she is forced to rush through the rooms to see if every thing is in proper order, and to make ready the dinner for the guests. How often, in the excitement of such employments, do men think of God ? And if it happens thus in well-regulated households, how is it in those disorderly ones in which the chief thought is amusement ? How little thought is there given to the fear of God, in order that domestic affairs, the education of children, the discipline of the servants, and other duties may not be neglected ! The married person must care for many souls and be answerable for their salvation, while the unmarried, in most cases, will be held accountable only for his own. Dearly beloved ! "I would have you to be without solicitude." He who is unmarried has only one care, and is one with himself ; but he who is married has innumerable cares, " and he is divided." (1 Cor. 7: 32-33.) These numerous cares, this variety of accidents, which befall married people, often cause them to commit sin, even (as it were) in spite of themselves. Thus, my dear Christian, "Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife," (1 Cor. 7: 27); for "it is good for a man so to be." (1 Cor. 7:26.) The state of marriage is a state of trouble, even among good and pious people. But who can describe the unhappiness of those who have made unsuitable marriages !

2. Many among you will willingly agree with me in saying that one can more easily and quietly serve God in the single, than in the married state ; but, in order to be free from many temptations, and to enjoy in marriage allowable pleasures, they prefer it to the single state. It is true that "If thou take a wife, thou hast not sinned. And if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned." But, shall they thus free themselves from carnal temptations ? No. The Apostle adds to the last sentence : " Nevertheless, such shall have tribulation of the flesh." Married people are much more subject to these temptations than are single folks ; and it is almost easier to restrain one's self altogether,

than to keep within proper limits. The lust of the human heart resembles, and possesses, the greed of fire : it is insatiable, and seeks its gratification in outside fuel, as well as in that which appertains to it. Very often it becomes a burden, instead of a gratification ; a torment, instead of a delight.

I can not see what is so charming in the marriage state ! There is nothing that we prize more highly than freedom : but who is more enslaved than a married person ? "The wife hath not power over her own body ; but the husband. And in like manner, the husband also hath not power of his own body ; but the wife." This subjection is far more oppressive than ordinary slavery is. A slave may, some day, hope to buy his freedom from his master ; but a husband, no matter how bad his wife may be, must endure his bondage until death separates them.

When the disciples understood from our Saviour the nature of this indissoluble servitude, they exclaimed : "If the case of a man with his wife be so, it is not good to marry." Our Saviour did not even deny this, but only said : "All receive not this word, but they to whom it is given." (Matt. 19 : 10-11.) Now, these are the difficulties in all, even the most prudent, marriages. "The wickedness of a woman is all evil." "There is no anger above the anger of a woman." (Eccles. 25: 17-23.) "As a yoke of oxen that is moved to and fro, so also is a wicked woman. He that hath hold of her, is as he that taketh hold of a scorpion." "A drunken woman is a great wrath ;" and "with a jealous woman is a scourge of the tongue which communicateth with all. (Eccles. 26 : 9-10-11.) "Far better is the iniquity of a man, than a woman doing a good turn." (Eccles. 42: 14.) How many men have experienced the truth of these words ! And, on the contrary, how many women, reversing the sex, might apply these same words to their husbands ! What is the conclusion to be drawn from all this ? That the marriage-state is a state of torment ; and that the unmarried are better off, both as regards the soul and the body.

Peroration.—Thus far, I have shown you the advantages of the state of virginity, over that of marriage. "I would that all men were ever as myself ;" but, as our Saviour himself acknowledges : "All receive not this word." "Every one hath his proper gift from God ; one after this manner, and another, after that." (1 Cor. 7: 7.) "But if they do not contain themselves, let them marry : for it is better to marry than to burn, (verse 9). Of the man contemplating marriage, St. Paul also says : "He sinneth not, if he marry." (1 Cor. 7: 36.) And to the parent desiring to settle his daughter in life, he says : "He that giveth his virgin in marriage, doeth well : and he that giveth her not, doeth better." (1 Cor. 7: 38.) "This I speak for your profit : not to

cast a snare upon you, but for that which is decent, and which may give you power to attend upon the Lord, without impediment." (1 Cor. 7: 35.) Let all who would follow my counsel, either in the single or married state, determine to strive courageously, and remember that there is no victory more glorious than that which is gained over our carnal lusts. He who conquers an enemy is a victor over another, but he that overcomes his concupiscence is a conqueror of himself. He who prostrates his enemy, fights against a visible foe ; but he that conquers his sinful desires, is the victor over an invisible one.

Human life is a continual warfare, and, even in the marriage state, we are not free from the temptations of the flesh. Since we must fight, let us fight courageously. And let us always have recourse in our struggles to the aid of the ever immaculate Virgin whose perpetual purity we commemorate to-day. She will assist us in the conflict, and for her sake, will God give us the victory ; for to her alone hath he said, with exceeding tenderness and complacency : " Thou art all fair, my beloved, and there is no spot in thee ! "

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

GROUNDS OF BELIEF IN THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

“He that is mighty hath done great things to me; and holy is his name.”
(Luke 1:49.)

As the entire series of Christian festivals revolves like a great planetary system, around the life of Jesus Christ, the true Sun of Justice, so it is meet that they should also include the life of her, of whom he assumed flesh and became man—the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. In instituting festivals in honor of Mary, the Church only does what she, the Immaculate One, prophesied with holy enthusiasm, ages ago, in the house of Zachary and Elizabeth: “From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.” (Luke 1:48.) And if we seek for any further explanation for the homage paid the humble Virgin of Nazareth, we shall find it in those other rapturous words she uttered on the same occasion: “He that is mighty hath done great things to me.” The marvelous privileges and glorious prerogatives which the Almighty bestowed on Mary, began at the very first moment of her existence, for she was conceived without sin, was free from the corruption of the primal curse, and was as pure and holy in her conception, as was Adam when he came forth from the hand of the Creator. Although, for centuries past, the belief in the Immaculate Conception has been a firmly-established and universally-accepted tradition among the faithful, it was not until our own times that it was defined by the Church as an article of faith. As I wish to make this dogma the subject of our meditation, to-day, I do not hesitate to declare that the grounds of our belief in the Immaculate Conception of Mary, may be found:

- I. *In the person of Jesus Christ; and*
- II. *In the person of Mary.*

I. *The grounds for belief in the Immaculate Conception of Mary may be found in the Person of Jesus Christ.*

How lamentable was the condition to which mankind had been reduced by the fall of Adam! St. Paul describing it in his Epistle to the Romans says: “As by one man sin entered into the world, and by sin, death: . . . so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned As by the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners: so, also, by the obedience of one, many shall be made just.” (Rom. 15:12, 19.) The Apostle sets before us the nature and awful consequences of original sin, which, with Adam,

drew us all into perdition ; subjected us, like him, according to the body to numerous and great hardships and tribulations, and finally, to death ; and according to the soul, deprived us of original holiness and justice, of supernatural grace and eternal salvation. "We all were," says the Apostle, "by nature children of wrath ;" (Ephes. 2 : 3); that is, sinful creatures, upon whom rested the indignation of God.

1. Man could not free himself from this miserable state by his own endeavors ; for, to all his efforts at reconciliation with God, to all his sacrifices and works of expiation, sin adhered, making them repulsive and disgusting in the sight of the offended Creator. Neither could any of the celestial powers aid in restoring him to the divine favor : for, whereas the angels are but finite creatures, the infinite offence offered to the divine majesty by sin, demanded an infinite satisfaction. What resource, then, was there for man in this desperate strait ? Where could he find a Redeemer whose sacrifice would be of such infinite value as to blot out the infinite guilt of sin ? St. John furnishes the key to the grand enigma in these touching words : "God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him may not perish but may have life everlasting." (John 3 : 16.) Yes, here was the pure and spotless Lamb of God who was to take away the sins of the world ; our Lord Jesus Christ, who, (as St. Paul says,) "being in the form of God, thought it no robbery himself to be equal to God : but debased himself, taking the form of a servant, being made to the likeness of men, and in shape found as a man. He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. 2 : 6, 8.)

2. Of Christ, alone, was it said that he "had no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (1 Pet. 2 : 22); but it was necessary that not sin alone, but every shadow and trace of sin, should be far removed from the Person of the Redeemer. So deep and foul is the blot which sin casts upon the soul, that no honor or dignity, no glory or renown, can efface its remembrance. Listen to an example. The ancient city of Rome attained a degree of splendor and glory which has never been equaled ; yet it could not be forgotten that Romulus, its founder, whilst engaged in building it, killed his brother, Remus. The pagan historian Livius says : "All the subsequent glory of her (Rome's) posterity, could not blot out that stain even to this day."

3. Now, if Mary had been infected with that evil of all evils, original sin, though it were but for a moment, the disgraceful contamination would have clung to her always, rendering her unfit for so close a union with the God of sanctity, who dwelt in her, and by the co-ope-

tion of the Holy Ghost, assumed flesh of her. This stain would have adhered even to the supreme sacrifice of the crucified Redeemer, and would have deprived it of the prerogative of infinite perfection which alone rendered it efficacious for our redemption. In a word, Jesus Christ, as the infinitely Holy One, the Just, the Conqueror of sin and hell, could not have been born of a mother, who had been, even for a moment, subject to sin, a slave of the devil, and a prey of hell. Is it not clear, then, my dearly beloved, that the very belief in Jesus Christ requires also a belief in the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception?

II. This article of faith is supported also by reasons found in the *person of Mary herself*.

1. She it was who was foretold by God to our first parents in Paradise, as the Woman predestined to crush the serpent's head. Now, as this was her sublime destiny, is it reasonable to suppose that she was conceived in sin like other mortals, or subject, even for the shortest space of time, to the power of that Evil One she was created to crush? Add to this a remarkable passage from the Epistle of St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, whom tradition accredits as the child whom Jesus placed before his Apostles, when they were disputing a question of precedence. Writing to the congregation at Ephesus, this holy bishop says: "The virginity of Mary, and her bringing forth, were hidden from the prince of this world." What does St. Ignatius mean hereby? Obviously this, that there existed no relation or communication between Mary and the Evil One. Now, if with regard to these events in the life of Mary Satan had no part or knowledge, how much more needful was it that she should be utterly removed from his power, when there was question of the possession of her soul, destined as it was to so intimate a union with the Person of the Word Incarnate, the future Conqueror of sin and hell!

2. This noble, precious soul could only be in the possession and power of Jesus who had chosen her for his virginal Mother. And just this circumstance furnishes us with a new argument for the Immaculate Conception of Mary. As a pure, immaculate virgin, Mary should conceive and bring forth her child. Untouched and inviolate, must be the one to whom the angel could predict: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee; and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God." (Luke 1: 35.) In the face of this great mystery, we cannot assume, that, when even the holy and just Joseph, as Mary's husband, according to the decree of God, had renounced his lawful rights, Satan should have unlawfully possessed

her even for the shortest time imaginable. No, as Mary was ever a Virgin, so, as the chosen Mother of Jesus, she must have been pure and immaculate from the very first instant of her conception and existence.

3. Again, we find this truth corroborated by what the Holy Scripture tells us about Jeremias and St. John the Baptist. It says that these two holy men were sanctified and freed from original sin before their birth. And who were they? For what were they destined? They were Prophets, one of whom should prophesy of Jesus as the coming Redeemer; and the other, point out to the people the Redeemer who had already come: "Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world." (John 1:29.) How incomparably higher and more sublime was the vocation and destiny of Mary! She was not merely to announce or point out Jesus as the Redeemer, but to actually conceive and bring him forth from the tabernacle of her spotless womb. Of her, Jesus assumed flesh, in order that with his holy body he might offer to God a pure, holy, and undefiled oblation. Mary became a new Eve, a holy progenitress, as Jesus became for us a second Adam, *i. e.* a new progenitor of holiness and justice, of whose Mother it can not be said what David in his Psalms says of himself and all men: "Behold, I was conceived in iniquities, and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Ps. 50: 7.) Mary was always, as the Church terms her in her Litany, the "Queen conceived without original sin." Let us, then, rejoice at the remembrance of the Immaculate Conception of Mary; but, at the same time, let us not forget the grand lesson which this mystery suggests to us. The great things which the Most High has done to Mary, convince us of the supreme value and dignity of innocence and purity in the eyes of God.

If you carefully preserve this great treasure which you received at your baptism, Jesus will dwell in you as he dwelt in Mary; and with Mary, you shall taste the blessings of immaculate purity, here below, in the peace and repose of your souls; and much more, in the happy Home beyond the clouds where the promise of Christ will be fulfilled in you: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God." (Matt. 5:8.) If any of you, however, should unfortunately have lost your baptismal innocence, strive earnestly to reach heaven by the only possible way which is still left to you—by the way of penance. Do not grow weary treading the toilsome path; fail not to call to your assistance your powerful protectress, the Queen of heaven; and with sentiments of filial confidence in her maternal tenderness, in highest veneration of her exalted sanctity, cry out to her in the spirit of the Church: "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us poor sinners who have recourse to thee!" Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

THE THREE-FOLD HOPE.

“I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness : make straight the way of the Lord.” (John 1 : 23.)

In my text of to-day, my dearly-beloved, St. John calls himself a voice, thereby giving his disciples plainly to understand that he was not the “Word made flesh,” but simply the voice of that Word. And those who listened to him knew that the Son of God could not then be far off, inasmuch as they already heard his voice in the person of the Baptist. As the voice prepares the way for the word, so that it may come forth intelligibly from the mouth of man, so also John, through his voice, (that is, through his preaching and baptism,) prepared the hearts of men for the coming of Christ. Hence, he says that he is that voice which Isaias had long before foretold as crying out : “ Make straight the way of the Lord.” In what did this preparation principally consist ? “ He preached the baptism of penance, for the remission of sins.” (Luke 3 : 3.) He consoled the people, and after he had imbued them with faith in the Redeemer, he animated them still further to love him and confide in him,

- I. *Through the hope of pardon ;*
- II. *Through the hope of grace ; and*
- III. *Through the hope of glory.*

This three-fold hope, my brethren, is the necessary fruit of that three-fold faith of which we spoke, last Sunday. From the faith of the commandments, springs the hope of pardon ; from the faith of miracles, the hope of grace ; and from the faith of the promises, the hope of glory. We will, to-day, examine the foundations of these three truths.

I. Every sinner, no matter how often or how grievously he may have violated the Commandments of God, has a sure *hope of pardon*. It is true that, when a hardened offender turns to God, and calls upon him for forgiveness, the abyss of evil cries out to the abyss of mercy ; or as the Psalmist expresses it : “ Deep calleth upon deep.” (Ps. 41 : 8.) But, though this abyss of wickedness be ever so deep and fathomless, that of God’s mercy is still greater and more profound ; where sin hath abounded, grace more fully abounds. “ Turn ye to me, saith the Lord of Hosts : and I will turn to you.” (Zach. 1 : 3.) Yea, he promises

still further : " If the wicked do penance for all his sins which he hath committed, and keep all my commandments, I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done." (Ezech. 18 : 21-22.)

Moreover, he not only invites the sinner to repentance, my dear brethren, but he waits long and patiently for his conversion. " I desire not the death of the wicked," he declares by the mouth of his prophet, " but that the wicked turn from his ways and live." (Ezech. 33 : 11.) " The Lord is compassionate and merciful." (Ps. 112 : 8.) He is merciful to all sinners, he is long-suffering toward the perverse and obdurate, so that they may be converted from the evil of their ways ; or, as the Wise Man says in his apostrophe to the Most High : " Thou overlookest the sins of men for the sake of repentance." (Wis. 11 : 24.) Why, then, do you delay your repentance, unhappy sinner ? " Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and patience, and long-suffering ? Knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance ? " (Rom. 2 : 4.) Long and zealously did St. John the Baptist preach to the Jews " the baptism of penance," for no other purpose than " for the remission of their sins " ! Yet, how often might he not have said to them : " Be not as your fathers, to whom the former prophets have cried, saying : Thus saith the Lord of Hosts : turn ye from your evil ways, and from your wicked thoughts : but they did not give ear." (Zach. 1 : 4.) I beseech of you now, my brethren, to take warning from the example of that hardened and stiff-necked people, and listening, to follow with docility and faith " the voice of one crying in the wilderness." Making straight the way of the Lord by the faith of the Commandments, you will not only enjoy the assured hope of pardon for past sins, but also, if you will humbly beg it from God, *the hope of grace* that will prevent you from committing sins in the future.

II. The hope of pardon, my dear Christians, is far from being so attractive to the sinner as *the hope of continued grace*. He knows that God's forgiveness for the past will avail him nothing, if he continues to offend him anew by fresh sins. He also knows that, of himself, he is utterly unable to avoid evil ; and that " it is God who worketh in *him* both to will and to accomplish according to his good will." (Phil. 2 : 13.) The Wise Man declares that : " To God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike ; " and when the converted sinner remembers that he was once an object of hatred to that good God, and reflects at the same time that he is now his friend and favorite, what can he do but cry out gratefully with St. Paul : " By the grace of God, I am what I am ! " (1 Cor. 15 : 10,) adding with the Psalmist : " What shall I render to the Lord, for all the things that he hath rendered to me ? " (Ps. 115 : 12.) The recollection of one's past misery is the first happy effect of grace, as well as the first step toward future holiness.

But this knowledge, my brethren, is due altogether to the ineffable goodness of God. "The Lord is my light and my salvation!" (Ps. 26: 1.) O ye poor, blinded sinners! no matter how deeply you may be sunk in misery, "Come ye to him, and be enlightened." (Ps. 33: 6.) Seeing, you will understand the danger from which you have been rescued by the mercy of God; and understanding, you will learn to dread a relapse into sin.

Grace is alike necessary to convert the sinner and to preserve him in the divine friendship after his conversion. The soul of a Christian is like a fortified city, which is surrounded on all sides by enemies. "Unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it." (Ps. 126: 1.) Our spiritual enemies are most numerous, their plans most cunningly devised for our destruction; and we are obliged to contend constantly with the traitorous foe within the walls—our own miserable concupiscence. A man's enemies, says the Lord, are they of his own household (Mich. 7: 6). But, for our consolation, let us be firmly assured that God will not desert us, unless we first turn our backs on him; and it is especially written of the just: "The Lord keepeth all them that love him." (Ps. 144: 20.) God does not constrain the free will of man; but his grace is always ready to co-operate with that free will in the grand work of salvation. "He has created us without our aid," says St. Augustine, "but he will not save us without our co-operation." His assistance is so essential to the success of our undertakings, that no one can begin, continue, or complete any work without the all-powerful help of God. He has, then, a just right to issue his commands, since his gracious help encompasses his children on every side, mercifully and efficaciously enabling them to keep his commandments to the end. See, O dearly beloved! how firm and consistent is the hope of grace, to the heart of the repentant and converted sinner!

III. *The hope of glory* is that strong and intimate confidence which supports the just, and enables them to persevere in the performance of their good works. "He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved," (Matth. 10: 22,) says our Saviour. In what does this being saved consist? "One can truly receive the happiness of the elect," says St. Augustine, "but one can never properly estimate it." "I can more easily tell what is not in heaven than what is there." Death shall be no more in that kingdom of delights; and sorrow, and weakness, and sickness shall be at an end; neither shall hunger, nor thirst, heat, disappointment, or any other misery, afflict the children of God. "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house: and thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of thy pleasure." (Ps. 35: 9.) "And they shall reign with God forever and ever." (Apoc. 22: 5.)

5.) "Oh, true life ! Oh, eternal life ! Oh, eternally happy life !" exclaims in an ecstasy the great Bishop of Hippo—unable to find words to express the feelings of his heart, when he would depict the ineffable joys of Paradise. And if any thing further were needed to encourage us, we shall find it in the exhortation and promise of our Saviour which is jointly the foundation of our hope : "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad : because your reward is very great in heaven." (Matth. 5 : 12.) St. Bernard, speaking of this same reward, says : "It is so great that one can not exhaust it ; and so precious that one can not sufficiently value it."

And what does God require from us, my brethren, in order to merit this heavenly recompense ? If he exacted of us to serve him for half an eternity, the demand would not be too great. "The days of man are short." (Job 14 : 5.) "Our days upon earth are but a shadow" (Job 8: 9), and they "are passed more swiftly than the web is cut by the weaver." (Job 7 : 6.) Should we not, then, apply these few brief days to serving our Creator, and keeping his commandments ? "His commands are not heavy." (1 John 5 : 3.) This short life may be filled with miseries, I will admit, my dear fellow-sufferers, but, with the Apostle of the Gentiles, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us." (Rom. 8 : 18.) That which we suffer is only temporary, and "our present tribulation, which is momentary and light, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory." (2 Cor. 4 : 17.)

Peroration. Therefore, "prepare ye the way of the Lord," beloved Christians, and "trust in him, all ye congregation of people." (Ps. 61 : 9.) "Being justified by faith, let us have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ : by whom, also, we have access through faith into this grace, wherein we stand, and glory in the hope of the glory of the sons of God." (Rom. 5 : 1-2.) God receives us back into his friendship even after we have frequently and basely insulted him. He upholds us by his all-powerful grace in the path of righteousness ; and he promises us, moreover, an eternal reward if we serve him faithfully during the short days of our life. Dearly beloved, have we not here three signal mercies of our good God, sufficient to excite us to the thorough and lasting reformation of our lives ? Ah ! yes, let us put our hope in his divine power and goodness ; and persevering bravely with his help in the path of virtue, let us hope to love, for all eternity, that gracious God in whom we have believed and hoped unwaveringly here below. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

THE GREAT DANGER OF DELAY OF REPENTANCE.

"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness : make straight the way of the Lord." (JOHN 1: 23.)

By these words of the Baptist, we are exhorted to remove the obstacles which have hitherto obstructed the channel of God's grace, and prevented our complete and permanent union with him. And these obstacles are

1. The *crimes* which we commit ;
2. The *passions* by which our thoughtless hearts are led astray.
3. The *occasions of sin* which have so often proved fatal to us.

Now, the means by which, alone, these impediments can be removed are

1. *A change of heart* ;
2. *A complete reform of life*, accompanied with
3. *A true and sincere repentance*.

To his gracious invitation our Lord adds the threat that, "unless *we* do penance, *we* shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3.) Nor is he satisfied with this public warning and denunciation. He speaks to us privately, in the interior of our souls. "Is it not time" (he says) "to arise from that slough of wickedness, in which you have been so long immersed ? 'Why will you die, O Israel ?' Why not consecrate the short remainder of your life to my service ?" What reply do you make to this gracious invitation ? Are you determined to turn from your evil ways ? You say that you have not sufficient grace to undertake so great a work ; or that, at present, you are too much engaged in temporal pursuits to think of a reform of life. I will prove to you that these deceptive excuses are

- I. *Groundless*.
- II. *Injurious to God*, and
- III. *Prejudicial to your own eternal welfare*.

- I. *These excuses are groundless*.

- I. It is very common for sinners who are unwilling to forsake their evil ways to attempt to justify themselves by alleging the inability of man to

bring about the great work of an entire change of life, by his own power alone. "Man," they say, "is very frail and sinful; a particular grace from God is necessary for so great an undertaking." They have long waited anxiously (they will tell you) in expectation of receiving that special grace, but as yet it has not been given them.

2. I admit that a complete and permanent amendment of life cannot be brought about *without the grace of God*. If it be true, as you say, that you have never been blessed with that grace, your impenitence has certainly some excuse. But you can not assert this with justice. Take, for instance, a view of your past life, and you will be convinced that God favored you in every stage of it with the most singular graces. He blessed you with the light of faith, provided you with necessary teachers, and nourished you with his Sacraments. When you turned your back upon him and walked in the way of sin, he followed you with the solicitude of a father, and importuned you by his graces and inspirations to return to his embraces. He did not suffer your conscience to become hardened in guilt; he convinced you of the emptiness and vanity of sinful pleasures, and mercifully tortured you with anxiety and remorse. Even at this moment—whilst I am speaking to you,—he works within your hearts to soften them, and, at the same time, inspires me with pious sentiments, in order that their utterance may reclaim you from your evil ways. Ah, your whole life has been one continued chain of graces, and you will discover hereafter that it has been your greatest crime *to have received so much and to have profited so little!*

3. If, by grace, you mean that *miraculous grace* which, in an instant, converted Saul, the persecutor, into Paul, the Apostle, I am willing to believe that you have never received it, and (what is more probable), that you never will. It would be presumption to expect it. The grace which the Saints received, and which fashioned them into Saints, did not exempt them from conflicts with corrupt nature; and if you presumptuously wait for an extraordinary grace to be given you, before you, in your turn, enter upon the work of self-reformation, you might just as well at once give up your soul for lost, and consign yourself to the horrors of despair.

II. *These excuses are injurious to God.*

1. Another and more injurious fallacy is involved in this important question. By alleging that you have never yet been favored with that grace on which, alone, a change of life depends, you are *guilty of ingratitude towards God, and tacitly accuse him of being, in some degree, the author of your impenitence.* "The sinner can speak only foolish things

in justification of himself, and he will endeavor to extenuate his crimes in opposition even to God himself." (Is. 32:6.)

2. This excuse is *irrational in itself*. For what consequence can you deduce from it, supposing it were true that God had never given you his grace? That you would not be accountable for the sins you commit or have committed, in the event of your dying in final impenitence? You dare not say that you are free to extend the unlimited number of your sins and crimes till it shall please God to touch your heart, and give you the long-expected grace; that the delay of your repentance cannot be criminal in the sight of God, because it depends not on your own will? Then, every sinner who defers his repentance, and dies in his sins, would be justified; the gates of hell would be closed, and the broad road, in which the multitudes are said to walk, would cease to exist. "O man, despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and patience, and long suffering? knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance?" (Rom. 2:4.) Are you not aware that his patience in enduring your disorders, should be a most pressing incentive to hasten your repentance, far from being alleged as a motive for continuing them?

3. If God had actually refused you the assistance of his grace, *the only rational consequences you might deduce from such a refusal are the following, viz :*

- (a.) *That your eternal welfare is thereby exposed to the most imminent danger.*
- (b.) *That it is your duty to pray incessantly for the grace of which you are deprived.*
- (c.) *To endeavor, by every means in your power, to appease the anger of God, and (as it were)*
- (d.) *To take Heaven by storm.*
- (e.) *That it is your duty, in the meantime, to avoid those occasions of sin which, heretofore, have so often proved fatal to you.*

But, to be continually repeating, that God will visit you, when in his mercy he shall think fit; and, in the meantime, make no efforts to give up the error of your ways, is the height of impiety. You might as well say: "I am not inclined at present to serve God. I can do without him yet a little longer. I live happily and contentedly in my sins. When he forces me however to attend to his calls, and when I can no longer resist his solicitations,—then I will yield, then I will say: 'Lord, here I am; ' but, in the meantime, I will enjoy my good fortune and make the most of the liberty he has given me, of deferring my conversion to a future indefinite period." What preparation is this for receiving that inestimable grace—a change of heart? Nevertheless, this it is

which gives confidence to the sinner, and hardens him in his guilt. But beware, my dear brethren—Oh ! I beseech you, beware ! The longer you defer the amendment of your life, the less grace you will receive, the more your sins will be multiplied, and the farther God will depart from you. The moments of mercy and grace, like a swift and silent river, flow rapidly on ; and, if it be true that you have not sufficient grace to bring about a change of heart, to-day,—to-morrow, you may not have sufficient grace to know that you stand in need of repentance.

III. *These excuses are prejudicial to your own eternal welfare.*

Dear Christians, another and, perhaps, more numerous class of sinners, are those who defer their conversion from day to day *because they are too much attached to the world*. These unhappy men say that they cannot devote their youthful years to the severe practices of religion ; that their blood is too warm to submit to so many restraints ; that the time will come when their passions will be cooler, and the pleasures of the world less attractive ; and that, *then*, they will apply themselves in good earnest to the affair of their eternal salvation.

1. In reply to this false reasoning, I naturally ask : *Who has assured you that you will reach that time of life*—that death will not surprise you during the course of those years which you so deliberately devote to your passions ? Are you certain that the Lord will not come at a time when you will least expect him ? Ah ! the thousands whom you see, day after day, drop into the grave in the very prime of life, proclaim the uncertain tenure of your own existence. Are you certain that these words will not be addressed to you, to-day : “‘Thou fool, this night thy soul will be required of thee ;’ and if so, what will thy projects of a future conversion avail ?”

2. Let us suppose, however, that you shall reach that advanced stage of life : *Are you assured by Heaven that you will then be better disposed than you are to-day ?* Did age change the heart of Solomon—of King Saul—of Jezebel—of Herodias ? It was in the maturity of life that their passions mounted to the highest pitch, and that their crimes were multiplied beyond number. The same, probably, will be *your* lot. Your old age will either be contaminated with the follies of your youth ; or, if satiety should create a disgust for the grosser excesses of the passions, your declining years will be attended with a hardness of heart, and a seared conscience which will infallibly lead to final impenitence. If man, with age, becomes wiser, he hardly ever becomes better.

3. We will suppose, however, that you have received an undeniable assurance that you will attain both to old age, and to sincere conver-

sion, *can you seriously and deliberately resolve to treat your good God in this contemptuous manner?* He is the Lord of all seasons, of all periods of life. He requires that both the bud and the bloom of our youth, as well as the autumnal decay and snowy hairs of our old age, be consecrated to his service. He is a jealous God. He will not give his glory to another, neither will he endure a partner in your affections. And can you resolve beforehand to devote the most precious portion of your life to the devil! Can you insult your Creator by saying : "Lord, when I am no longer capable of enjoying the world, I will turn to thee. After awhile, the world will no longer be to me a source of amusement. I must enjoy it while it lasts. A day will come, when it will reject me ; and then, O Lord, for want of other pleasures, I will turn to thee. Thou alone shall possess my soul!" Wretch! Worthless creature! As you live, so shall you die.

4. Perhaps, you may say, that you are at present disposed to amend your life, but that you have not the courage, that you are diffident, that you are afraid lest the difficulties, necessarily attending such an important and arduous task, should discourage you ; and that, if you make the attempt, and fail, you would be exposed to the ridicule and scorn of all your acquaintances. You defer your repentance on the supposition that God will touch your heart at a future period : while on the other hand, if you reform to-day, you say that you dare not rely on his assistance? You confide in his mercies at a time when you are offending him ; and you cannot hope for the continuance of those mercies should you attempt to serve him ! O man ! where is that reason, common-sense and sound judgment on which you pride yourself? Are you only senseless and inconsistent, when your salvation is at stake ?

5. Would it not be more reasonable to say : "*I will begin this instant, to labor for the salvation of my soul. I will try what I can do with the help and assistance of God.* A man who, in fording a river, is surprised by the sudden torrent, and in danger of perishing, endeavors to reach land, and does not give himself up for lost, until his strength is thoroughly exhausted. He does not say : "Perhaps I shall not succeed ; my strength may possibly fail me ; therefore, I will not try to save myself." No : he exerts his whole strength ; he strains every nerve ; he does not give up the struggle till he is fairly overpowered by the force of the torrent.

You, also, are in danger of perishing ; the waters gain upon you,—the torrent is carrying you away ; and will you hesitate, whether it be prudent to endeavor to save yourself? Will you sacrifice to deliberation the few moments which remain to you, to make your escape, and avoid eternal death?

MASSILLON.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

THE LOVE OF GOD.

“ Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” (Luke 3:4).

The whole season of Advent is a time of preparation for the coming of our Redeemer. “ Prepare ye the way of the Lord ! ” It is divine faith, my dear brethren, which prompts this preparation ; and heavenly hope, which encourages us to keep the Commandments, in spite of all obstacles which our evil inclinations oppose thereto ; and to walk steadfastly in the way of salvation. But, since this path is, for the most part, rough, difficult, and repulsive to our natural desires, it is the all-powerful love of God alone, which can make all the crooked paths straight, and all the rough ways plain. If men would but love the Lord, their highest Good, with all their hearts, with all their souls, and with all their minds, they would easily overcome all obstacles, here below, and without doubt, would hereafter, “ see the salvation of God ; ” that is, they would enjoy for all eternity, the Beatific Vision of him who is the delight of heaven and earth, our first beginning and our last end. My dearest Christians, I implore you, then, to love this Holy One who is most loving, most lovely, and most perfect in all his attributes. Love the Lord, your God,

- I. *With your whole hearts*, that is, *with your whole understanding* ;
- II. *With your whole souls*, that is, *with your whole will* ; and
- III. *With your whole minds*, that is, *with all your memory*.

I. Human understanding acknowledges that God is most worthy of our love :

1. *Because he is the essence of all good* ; and
2. *Because all his works are infinitely great*.

I. Knowledge of a good is essential to a love of it. No matter how precious a thing may be, if we do not know its value, we do not love it. God, it is true, is so far above us, my brethren, that we cannot fully comprehend his being or perfections. “ What do you imagine God to be ? ” asks St. Augustine. “ Whatever image you form of him, is not correct ; for he would not be God, if you could comprehend him.” Nevertheless, the knowledge of himself which God imparts to his creatures, is in proportion to their love for him. No truer conception can be formed of the Deity, than that which regards and worships him

as the highest, most desirable, and everlasting Good ; a good which may be, indeed, admired, but never comprehended by any of his creatures.

2. Man has been favored from the beginning, with the most wonderful revelations of the Deity. "The heavens show forth the glory of God." (Ps. 18: 2.) He, it is, of whom the Apostle says, "Of him, and by him, and in him, are all things." (Rom. 11: 36.) When we contemplate this great universe in which we live, we may form some idea of the majesty and grandeur of the Creator. "He manifests his inestimable power," says St. Bernard, "in the creation of such numerous, great, various, and splendid things." His marvelous wisdom is displayed in that matchless order which regulates everything above, below, and in the center of the earth. When we reflect upon the aim and exalted destiny of all created things, we can not sufficiently admire the goodness of God nor the wonderful beauties and benefits of creation in which even the most ungrateful have a share. By these, and similar considerations, we must endeavor as much as possible, my brethren, to grow in the knowledge of God. And this knowledge must certainly beget in our souls, a true and lasting love of God.

II. To love God with our whole souls, *the will must be ready.*

1. *To fulfil all the commandments of God, and*
2. *To do this in adverse, as well as in agreeable, circumstances.*

1. God says to man ; "My son give me thy heart." (Prov. 23: 26.) What does this mean, dear Christians ? Nothing else but to do God's will, as he himself explains : "I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man according to my own heart, who shall do all my will." (Acts 13: 22.) "Remain in my love," says our Saviour to his disciples ; "If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love ; as I always have kept my Father's commandments, and do remain in his love." (John 15: 9, 10.) The commandment of love, "is the greatest and first commandment of the law," (Matth. 22: 38,) yea, it is, as St. Paul declares it to be, "the fulfilling of the law." (Rom. 13: 10.) He that truly loves God will certainly keep his commandments ; but he that does not keep his commandments, shows thereby that he has no love for God. If divine love is present in a soul, it is sufficient ; but if every thing else is present, except charity, all else is of no account.

2. It is not enough to perform the will of God or obey his commands in certain circumstances agreeable to the Christian. Man's will must be submissive to that of God in *all* circumstances. "Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ ? shall tribulation ? or distress ?

or famine? or nakedness? or danger? or persecution? or the sword? In all these things, we overcome, because of him that hath loved us." (Rom. 8:35,37.) What did not St. Paul, in common with all the other Apostles, suffer for Christ? Love assuaged all their pains, and sweetened all their tribulations. "Jacob served seven years for Rachel: and they seemed but a few days, because of the greatness of his love" (Gen. 29:20.); although that ancient patriarch acknowledges himself that: "Day and night was I parched with heat, and with frost, and sleep departed from my eyes." (Gen. 31:40.) According to the testimony of St. Bernard, "where true love exists, labor ceases to be a burden, and the lover finds a joy in the severest toil." St. Chrysostom says, that an ardent lover often dies for his beloved, although, after death, he can expect no return from her. O, what an outrage! Man is willing and eager to do more for the love of a miserable, perishable creature, than for the love of his living God! How often, alas! my brethren, do we voluntarily turn our backs upon him without even the excuse of a fear of death!

III. We love God with our memory

1. *When we constantly recall the recollection of his past graces and benefits, and*
2. *When we occupy our thoughts with those which we yet hope to receive from him in the future.*

1. Love always demands a return of love. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee." (Jerem. 31:3.) Mighty and manifold are the evidences of his love which God has manifested in his works. "Remember, man!" says St. Augustine, "that once thou hadst no being, but that now thou hast begun to live; and for this, thou hast to thank God." "Thy hands have made me and formed me," says the Psalmist. (Ps. 118:73.) "Yes, thou hast made me," man might exclaim, "only a little less than the Angels!" "Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor; and hast set him over the works of thy hands." (Ps. 8:6,7.) And St. Paul adds his testimony to this universal chorus of divine praise and love: "But God commendeth his charity toward us: because when as yet we were sinners, according to the time, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8,9.) Let us not ask, dear Christians, with the ancient Prophet: "Why then is thy apparel red, and thy garments like theirs that tread in the wine-press?"—for Christ answers, with a pathos and tenderness that might melt the very hardest heart: "'I have trodden the wine-press alone.' (Isai. 63:2,4.) I have suffered for you, I have agonized for you, I have shed the last drop of my blood, all out of pure love for you, my poor unworthy children!" Does not such love

deserve—shall it not, this day, elicit an ardent and sincere return of love?

2. What shall I render to the Lord, for all the things that he hath rendered to me?" cries the grateful Psalmist. (Ps. 115:12.) To me! You see, my dear brethren, that here there is question of personal favors done the royal David. Apart from all those past benefits which are common to the whole human race, let us, (following his example), consider those particular blessings which we daily receive; the grace of Baptism and faith, the grace of vocation, the grace of God's long-suffering patience in our regard, the grace of conversion, of the frequent remission of our sins, all our daily inspirations from heaven, etc. O, Lord! what shall I render to thee for all these things? "He hath not done in like manner to every nation." (Ps. 147:20.) "He hath set me in a place of pasture. He hath brought me up on the water of refreshment." (Ps. 22:2.) "Unless the Lord had been my helper; my soul had almost dwelt in hell." (Ps. 93:17.) Ask yourselves, this hour, my brethren,—each one of you in the secret of your soul: What return can I make for all these benefits?—And I will reply to you in the name of God: *The only acceptable one of love.* He requires nothing but what he himself has commanded: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.*"

Peroration.—Knowing clearly this commandment and the most perfect method of fulfilling it, let us, therefore, love the Lord our God with our whole heart, with our whole soul, and with all our mind. The very thought of such a precept should overwhelm us with humility and reverential gratitude.—"My God!" exclaims St. Augustine, "who am I in comparison to thee, that thou shouldst command me to love thee?—Thou threatenest, and art angry when I do not love thee! Thou promisest me a great reward for loving thee. Where, then, is my love for thee? What pleasure or gratification dost thou find in me?" What king says to his subject: "Let us be friends, and, as a reward, I will give you a whole province"—? Not to our own merits, but to the ineffable goodness of God, are we indebted for all our blessings. He wishes to be loved, and he, alone, is most worthy of our love. How foolish then, are we, when we do not love him! O most amiable God! from this time forward, we will love thee with our whole heart, and with our whole soul, and with our whole mind. By this love, shall we overcome all the difficulties of this life; all that is crooked in us shall be made straight, all that is rough in us shall be made plain. And, in the end, we "shall see the salvation of God," and love and praise thee for all eternity! Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT.

THE FULNESS OF TIME.

“When the fulness of time had come, God sent his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, that he might redeem those who were under the law.” (Gal. 4: 4, 5.)

The time had, at length, arrived—that full and perfect time—which was best fitted for the fulfilment of the hopes of all the nations of the earth. You are well aware of the reasons why the redemption of the world was deferred until four thousand years after the fall of man. To-day, we shall merely consider *the time* itself in which the Redeemer made his appearance in our midst, in order to learn whether it was really the most appropriate period for that gracious event,

- I. *In view of the corruption of the world;*
- II. *In view of its expectation of a Redeemer; and*
- III. *In view of its political condition.*

I. The period fixed by God for our Saviour's birth was no mere matter of accident. If Providence arranges even the most trifling events ; if not a hair of our head falls without his knowledge, would he not send his only-begotten Son at the most appropriate time ? The time of which our present Gospel speaks, was indeed the right era chosen by God for the grand event, especially *in view of the universal corruption of the world, which had then reached its worst stage.*

1. *The fulness of time was, indeed, the darkest and most unhappy period of the world's history.* I blush to describe that horrible night of Paganism which cast its deadly shadows over the earth in the days of St John the Baptist. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, portrays in terrible words the moral corruption of that epoch : “ And they changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into the likeness of the image of a corruptible man, and of birds, and of four-footed beasts, and of creeping things. Wherefore God gave them up to the desires of their heart, to uncleanness : to dishonor their own bodies among themselves. Being filled with all iniquity, malice, fornication, covetousness, wickedness, full of envy, murder, contention, deceit, malignity, whisperers, detractors, hateful to God, contumelious, proud, haughty, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, foolish, dissolute, without affection, without fidelity, without mercy.” (Rom. 1: 23-31.) Paganism not only committed, without shame, secret sins of all kinds, but it went so far as to raise vice upon its altars, and pay it divine honor. Sin took

the place of religion and was worshipped as a God. Where could we find lower depths than these ?

2. The abomination of desolation had fixed its seat at Rome, the capital of the pagan world, distributing thence its deadly poison over the whole broad Roman empire. All those relations of life which should ensure its stability were either defiled, loosened, or destroyed. The individual man had lost his dignity, worth, and manhood. Slavery had reduced the masses below the level of the brute creation. Family life was dissolved. The woman lay dishonored under the feet of man ; and the children trembled before their father, who, at his will, could repudiate or kill them. In civil life, despotism and cruelty ruled,—denying, and trampling upon all individual rights. In those days preceding the fulfilment of the promises, even the temples of the heathen gods stood deserted and empty. Their priests were without faith ; they omitted the customary worship, or performed it only through compulsion. Magicians, sorcerers, and soothsayers carried on their tricks publicly for the corruption of the people. The more-enlightened pagans turned to philosophy for a relief, and sought their consolation in the investigation of science ; but bitter, gnawing doubt was the result of their study and research. Men had reached that point which is described by the last and greatest historian of paganism in these words : “ For us, there is no hope, nothing but despair.”

3. The Jewish people of that day were sunk in a similar depth of corruption. Their multiplied dissensions had produced a fearful indifference to the observance of the commandments of God. After the return from the captivity of Babylon, the Pharisees labored with all zeal for the observance of the law ; but kept only its letter. Their religious fidelity was mere ostentation, obstinacy, and hypocrisy ; the spirit of the law and the traditions of their fathers had perished for them. Still, they stood higher in the estimation of the people than the Sadducees who had branched off into heresy, setting themselves above the law, despising tradition, and giving themselves up to sensuality and infidelity. They denied the providence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the resurrection of the body. Besides the Pharisees and Sadducees, there was the sect of the Essenes, who, wishing to practice virtue, dwelt together in remote places, and favored a community of goods. Some of them lived in continency, condemning matrimony ; but, although they rigorously observed the Sabbath, they took no part in the sacrifice at Jerusalem. The Jews oscillated between these three religious parties ; and, by degrees, sank deeper and deeper in infidelity. Secularized and sensualized, the hopes of the nation were fixed upon a Messias, who would appear as a mighty king, and gratify their carnal lusts. No

prophet had appeared among them for a long time. The Almighty no longer worked miracles in their behalf, and the divine protection, so often and so visibly afforded them in all the past periods of their history, seemed to be entirely withdrawn.

4. The national glory of Israel had departed. Subjugated to the yoke of pagan Rome, the Jews were denied even the free exercise of their religion. The sacerdotal robes, without which no religious function or divine service was possible, were kept in those days, by the order of Herod, in the citadel of Antonia, and only loaned to those of the high-priests who showed themselves the creatures of his power. Moreover, through intercourse with pagans, a horrible corruption of morals had supervened among the Jews. The bond of marriage sat so loosely upon them that the most trifling cause sufficed for a divorce. This one circumstance demonstrates how low the chosen people of God had fallen.

The whole body of human society was suffering from sin, as from the spreading of a fearful ulcer. In this fulness of misery, the Lord arose to manifest his mercy. "Where sin abounded, grace hath abounded more." (Rom. 5 : 20.) The hour of earth's deepest degradation seemed to the Divine Word the most appropriate time for his saving advent. Mankind had to be convinced of their utter inability to free themselves from their misery ; and their horribly degraded condition was to furnish the occasion for the most glorious triumph of the grace of God.

II. In the fulness of time, the Lord sent his only-begotten Son into the world, *because the expectation of the promised Redeemer had then arisen to its highest degree of intensity.* The greater and more pressing the need, the louder and more vehement is the cry for help. The spark of goodness which still glowed upon the earth in the days preceding the advent of Christ, strove to enkindle in all hearts a powerful longing for the Redeemer. We find traces of this burning desire not only among the Jews, but also among the better-disposed of the pagans.

1. *Ever since the days of Adam, the hope that the woman's seed would crush the serpent's head, and that, in this seed, all the nations of the earth should be blessed, had glowed like a brilliant star before the eyes of all pious Israelites.* Kings and Prophets desired to see the day of Christ, and their desire was not gratified. Those ancient Patriarchs may have told their sons and daughters, time and again, of the great promise to their race ; and, together with them, may have longingly sighed for him who was to be sent. When the people, in later times, were languishing in the hard servitude of Egypt, their desires only waxed stronger. Moses, their great, God-appointed leader, often reminded them of the promise ; and afterwards, when the Lord overcame their

enemies and gave them the Promised Land; and when he raised among their judges and kings, great and famous men, must not the eyes of all believing Israelites have looked eagerly into the future, seeking the great Messias who was to elevate them, (as they supposed,) to the summit of all earthly fame and splendor? How must the Temple, with its numerous priesthood, its grand and dignified ceremonials of worship, have increased in the hearts of all pious Jews, the longing for the coming Emmanuel! Moreover, at all times, the Lord had sent prophets to his people to keep alive in their hearts the remembrance of the promise; and these holy seers had painted the picture of the Redeemer, and the glorious future of his kingdom, in the most glowing colors.

But, if the Israelites in the days of their greatness and prosperity, could even have forgotten "the star out of Jacob," those sad days of universal misery prior to Christ, would have powerfully reminded them of the hope of their race. Great calamities broke in upon the chosen people of God. They languished under the heathen yoke; they were led into the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities; their temple was destroyed; and, without priest, altar, or sacrifice, they sat by the rivers of Babylon, and wept over the misery of their nation. All the more longingly, then, did they look to the future, and expect the coming of their Redeemer and mighty Helper. And when, finally, they languished under the dominion of the Roman Emperor and his satellites, and the scepter was taken away from Juda, the eyes of all pious Jews must have been raised to heaven with burning desire for relief. The signs of the times, and the deep demoralization of their people, alike convinced them that the salvation from God was at hand.

Witness of this longing is the holy aged *Simeon* who, led by the spirit of God into the temple at the presentation of Jesus, manifested his desire. "And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel." (Luke 2: 25.) So, too, the prophetess *Anna*, who, on the same occasion, praised the Lord, "and spoke of him to all that looked for the redemption of Israel." (Luke, 2: 38.) Other witnesses were the *high priests*, who sent messengers to John in the wilderness to know if he were the Messiah; and the whole Jewish nation manifested this desire, when they cried out to the Saviour: "How long dost thou hold our souls in suspense? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." (John, 10: 24.) Even the *Samaritans* shared this desire, hoping for a Redeemer, as the Jews did. "I know that the Messiah cometh (who is called Christ): therefore when he is come, he will tell us all things," (John 4: 25,) said the Samaritan woman to Jesus at Jacob's well. So great had the longing for a Redeemer become in those days, that false Christs arose who had many followers among the people.

2. *We must admire the same expectation among the heathens of that time.* Whether it was that the depth of misery raised up the best elements of paganism to such a hope, or that the dispersion of the Jewish nation disseminated among the heathens the promise of a Redeemer, the fact remains that the attention of the pagan world was attracted to Judea, whence the Redeemer was to come. The Roman historian Tacitus declares that, in those days, the entire East was filled with the expectation of "a mighty Ruler" who should come forth from Juda. "The majority were convinced that it was written in the ancient writings of the priests, that about this time, the East should become mighty, and that the Lord of the world should come forth from Judea." (Hist. L. 5 : 13.) Suetonius, the historian, uses similar language : "The entire East resounded with the ancient and oft-repeated prophecy, that, according to the decrees of the Fate, the ruler of the world should come forth from Judea." (Vesp. 4.) The poet Virgil announced that the last moment was at hand "in which that wonderful year, prophesied by the Cumean Sybil, should arrive." (Ecl. IV. AEn. 6.) This expectation was so powerful among the pagans that many of them traveled to Jerusalem in order to see the Redeemer of the world. And when we take into consideration that the Jews were, at that time, an enslaved nation, bowed down under the yoke of the Roman Emperor, it is still more astonishing that the proud Romans should have turned their eyes expectantly toward the religious center of their despised captives.

III. But what must excite our wonder in the highest degree is *the political condition of the world at the time Christ was born.* It promised the greatest results to the work of redemption. It is true, the leaven of the Gospel could have seized and permeated the most conflicting elements, but the wisdom of God waited for a moment in the world's history, when it could most easily and quickly draw all hearts toward itself.

1. *All nations should be gathered under one scepter.*
2. *A universal peace should reign over the whole world ; and*
3. *Israel should have finished its predicted course.*

1. All people should be joined in *a political union*, so that upon this arch, so to speak, might more easily be erected the great corner-stone of *the unity of faith*. From the time of the building of the tower of Babel, God's people were dispersed over the face of the earth, and confounded in their language ; and, in consequence thereof, their unity ceased. Men having given up their union in God, found themselves divided into numerous tribes. And the more sin increased, the wider paganism was spread abroad, the greater and more disastrous

became the rupture between the various nations of the earth. A house divided against itself was not fitted to be the temple of the Lord, in which all the nations of the earth should worship him in peace and unity.

2. But at the time of Christ's advent, after centuries of warfare among nations and bitter struggles for supremacy, *the Romans became masters of the world.* Rome's unconquered eagles floated victoriously over Spain, Gaul, Germany, Great Britain, Asia Minor, and the coasts of Africa. The long, military roads branched out from Rome into all adjacent countries ; and, for the first time in thousands of years, an interval of peace supervened. The world seemed tired of war and bloodshed. The temple of Janus was closed. The golden age seemed to have revisited the earth.

3. Admire *the divine wisdom as manifested in the history of Israel.* It had a mission for the whole world. It was not only to preserve the revelation of God and the hope of the Redeemer, but it was also chosen as witness of the heavenly promises to all the nations of the earth. It had, therefore, to come in contact with all the great nations, in order to appear among them and speak to them as the prophet of God. And the Redeemer could not come until Israel had completed its prophetic march over the face of the globe. Babylon, Niniveh, and the Pharaohs had seen and heard the prophets of God. The prophecies were still further spread through the culture of the Greeks, especially under the Ptolemies, when the Old Testament was translated into the Greek tongue. And when, at last, the power of the Roman Empire possessed the earth, there was not a large city within its domains, which did not contain a Jewish colony. Israel was a living prophecy. The nations were prepared to see the salvation of God—ready to look upon him in whom all the promises of God were to be fulfilled.

Is it not a great spectacle, when we thus behold the nations¹ of the earth, in the fulness of time, all subservient to the one almighty will of God? Like clouds, we behold them driven over the face of the universe, one misty shape following fast upon another, until, suddenly dividing, the Sun of Justice shines gloriously forth in their midst. “ Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight his paths, every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low : and the crooked shall be made straight : and the rough ways plain.” Thus the prophet had said. The Lord himself, having prepared the way for his Son upon earth, when all the valleys had been filled, and all the mountains brought low, when all the crooked had been made straight and all the rough ways plain—sent down his salvation from on high, and the glorious mystery of Bethlehem spread over all the world.

BISHOP EHRLER.

ON CHRISTMAS DAY.

THE BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST.

"A child is born to us." (Isai. 9 : 6.)

In these few words, a great mystery is revealed to us, and a grand doctrine proposed to us, than which nothing can be more admirable. The ancient Patriarchs had long looked upward, sighing for the advent of the Messiah, and crying out with inconceivable ardor : "Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just." (Isai. 45 : 6.) To day, at last, their supplications are granted ; the word is made flesh and dwells among us. (John 1 : 14.) To-day, the divine nature celebrates its bridal with our human nature ; and those sublime nuptials are in Bethlehem. O, ye happy shepherds ! "blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear." (Matth. 13 : 16.) But, "blessed are they that have not seen, and have believed." (John 20 : 29.) Let us, my brethren, seek to merit this latter benediction ; and, contemplating with the eyes of faith, the Divine Babe resting on his hard bed in the manger, let us consider :

- I. *That God has become man ; and*
- II. *That he has become man out of love for man.*

I. In meditating upon those words : "A child is born to us," we must remember :

1. That Jesus became a poor man ; and
2. That he took upon himself all our miseries.

I. The Incarnation is, in itself, the most stupendous work of God's omnipotence : a work, which we may, indeed, admire, but can never fathom. For, as St. Augustine remarks : "The only reason why it took place, is the power of him who willed it ; otherwise, it would be nothing supernatural, nothing wonderful or unusual." "No word shall be impossible with God," (Luke 1 : 37,) but "it is the glory of God to conceal the word." (Prov. 25 : 2.) The birth of Christ, the possibility of his birth, and the circumstances attending it, are all wonderful. An angel announces it ; the power of the Most High overshadows it ; the Holy Ghost comes ; the Blessed Virgin believes ; she conceives ; she gives birth ; and still she remains an immaculate virgin ! Who is not lost in wonder and admiration ?

We are not so much astonished, however, that God should become man, as that he should become *a poor man*. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests ; but the Son of man hath not where to

lay his head." (Luke 9: 58.) "He came unto his own ; and his own received him not." (John 1: 11.) He says of himself : "The world is mine, and the fulness thereof." (Ps. 49: 12). Yet St. John tells us that : "The world knew him not." (John 1: 10.) He was not even granted a place to be born in ; there was no room for him in the inns of Bethlehem ; he was born in a stable, like an animal. O, what a mystery ! "He who ascended upon the cherubim" (Ps. 17: 11), who has "the earth for his footstool" (Matth. 5: 35), is not recognized by the whole world. Even Israel, to whom he hath shown greater favors than to any other nation—"hath not known him." (Isai. 1: 3.) He did not wish to enter the world as the King of Glory." (Ps. 23: 7.) He did not desire to be adored as "the Lord in his holy temple." (Ps. 10: 5.) He came to make atonement for sin. Now, since "pride is the beginning of all sin" (Eccles. 10: 15.), he wished to begin his earthly life in the deepest humility. He came into the world as the heavenly Physician to cure all its ills by suitable remedies. All that was in the world was luxury, riches, and pride ; but by the example of his birth, he showed how these vices may be cured. The precious virtue of Poverty was prized by no one ; our Saviour chose Poverty as his bride, and by his choice, he exalted it above all the riches and treasure of earth.

3. But, he became not only a poor man—*he also took upon himself all our miseries.* He shared not only our humanity, but also our infirmities. Who would not rather be a full-grown man than a helpless infant ? This choice was in our Saviour's power ; but he chose the latter, in order that the prophecy might be fulfilled : "I am brought to nothing, and I knew not." (Ps. 72: 22.) This truth seemed so incomprehensible to certain heretics that they contended that our Lord was impassible in his human nature, possessing sensibility neither of body nor of soul. On the contrary, he was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity." (Isai. 53: 3.) He must suffer, and thus enter into his heavenly kingdom ; and, consequently, his body must have been endowed with the most acute sensibility. "Jesus, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well." (John 10: 28.) "And when he had fasted forty days and nights, he was afterward hungry." (Matth. 4: 2.) While hanging on the cross, he exclaimed : "I thirst." Are not all these signs of sensibility ? We read in another place : "Now is my soul troubled." (John 12: 27.) His soul was overcome with emotions of pity on seeing Jerusalem, and "he wept over it." (Luke 19: 41.) Again, in the Garden of Olives, on the night of his Passion, he saith to his disciples : "My soul is sorrowful even unto death. (Mark 24: 32.) Do not these expressions indicate a high degree of sensibility ? As "the first-born amongst many breth-

ren," (Rom. 8:29), "It behooved him in all things to be made like to his brethren. (Hebr. 2:17.) Thus, he must have been not only a man, but a man capable of suffering.

II. *God became man out of love for mankind!* In this he has shown

1. *His justice;*
2. *His mercy;* and
3. *His love.*

1. We "were by nature the children of wrath," (Ephes. 2:3), and enemies of God. This anger is appeased since "the coming of the Prince of Peace." (Isai. 9:6.) To-day, "mercy and truth have met each other : justice and peace have kissed." (Ps. 84:11). God could not be reconciled to man unless a Mediator appeared who would be, at the same time, God and man, and who would be capable of offering to the Divine Justice an acceptable satisfaction. This was accomplished in the birth of our Saviour. In it, we behold both the Mediator and the atonement. The satisfaction was as great as the sin. The humiliation of a God more than compensated for the proud self-exaltation of man. God was insulted, the Mediator was Jesus Christ, and "God, indeed, was in Christ." (2 Cor. 5:19.) Consequently, peace was restored between God and man ; and Justice could find no fault either with the Mediator, or with the terms of peace which he made.

2. It was *the mercy* of our Lord Jesus Christ which led him to assume the office of Mediator. Divine Justice cried out for satisfaction—which neither man nor angel could grant : but thou, O loving Saviour, didst cast thyself into the breach! It was "the mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed." (Lament. 3:22.) He became incarnate through love of man, so that sin might not go unpunished, nor the sinner be left unaided. "He loveth mercy and judgment;" (Ps. 32:5); "and mercy exalteth itself above judgment." (James 2:13.) "The goodness and kindness of our Saviour God appeared." (Tit. 3:4.) His goodness moved him to assume human nature ; hence, in the Scriptures he compares himself to a good shepherd, and to the father of the prodigal son. (Luke 15.) As his power was displayed in the creation, and his wisdom in the beautiful order of the universe, so, in an especial manner, is his goodness made known in our redemption. The Church explains the reason of this, when she announces to us : "This day you shall know, that the Lord will come, and save us : and in the morning you shall see his glory :" as was prophesied longbefore by the royal prophet. "We are filled in the morning with thy mercy." (Ps. 89:14.)

3. Now I ask : Why has our Saviour shown such great mercy to

us? *Because he has loved us so ardently.* The doctors of the Church have inferred and taught, that love was the cause of the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, through the co-operation of the Holy Ghost. Love drew our Saviour down from heaven; but since love can not exist without equality between those who love—in order to secure this equality, Jesus assumed our nature. As love ever seeks to be united to the object beloved, hence, “*The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.*” (John 1:14.) And, in order to gain our love, from the moment of his advent, he came into the world, not as a full-grown man like Adam, but as a helpless infant. What is more capable of calling forth love than a beautiful, innocent child? “*To-day the angels announce, not a great and glorious God, but a little amiable God.*” (St Bernard.) And who will not love such a God?

“*A child is born to us!*” The great God lies in a poor crib, under the form of a new-born infant. Dearly beloved! “unless you be converted, and become as *a little child*, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 18: 3.) “*For whom he foreknew, he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his Son.*” (Rom. 8: 29.) “*Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, for a leader and a master to the Gentiles.*” (Isai. 55: 4.) “*God has become man, indeed, through love of man.*” “*Remember, O man,*” says St. Bernard, “*that thou comest from dust and ashes, and be not proud. Remember that thou art now united to God, and be not ungrateful.*”

O most loving Saviour! thy Nativity conducts us to humility; and the cause of thy birth inspires us with gratitude. To-day, in company with the shepherds, we offer thee an humble, grateful, and contrite heart, which “*thou wilt not despise.*” (Ps. 50: 19.) We exclaim, with the Psalmist: “*What shall I render to the Lord, for all the things that he hath rendered to me?*” (Ps. 115: 12.) We are firmly resolved, from this day forward, to shew our humble gratitude (not only in word, but much more in deed,) for that sublime mystery which proclaims to us that a divine “*child is given to us*” for the eternal salvation of our souls. “*Glory be to God on high, and peace on earth to men of good will!*” Amen.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

THE MORAL OF THE INCARNATION.

“Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people: for this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. (Luke 2: 10-11.)

At last, after the season of Advent,—with all its hopes and desires—is past, we have reached the day which must awaken in every Christian heart the same rapturous emotions which filled the souls of the shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem when the angel cried out to them: “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people: for this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David.” Let us hasten, in spirit, with those pious shepherds, to the holy crib of the Divine Infant, and there prostrating ourselves in profound adoration, worship him who has come into the world under such wonderful circumstances, and in whom are hidden the highest mysteries of faith. Whilst we consider, on the one hand, the glory of the Child as announced by the splendid apparition of the angels, and, on the other, his poverty, as shown in the misery and lowliness of his place of birth, let us endeavor to draw some practical lessons from the future career of the Holy Babe, or, in other words, let us meditate on this occasion upon the holy life of Christ. Perhaps you will say, that you have already read and heard much of this divine life: but is that enough? What will it profit you to know the whole history of Jesus, if you do not, at the same time, draw from it lessons for your own guidance? I will then, to-day, show

- I. *What Christians must believe of the life of Christ; and*
- II. *What they must do in order to imitate it.*

I. Dearly beloved Christians! if you wish to know what you must hold concerning the life of Jesus, you must, in the first place, consider why he wished to live upon earth under the form of a mortal man.

I. It was solely to honor his heavenly Father (as every individual man should seek to honor him)—through his life. Hence, he said: “My food is to do the will of him that sent me, that I may perfect his work,” (John 4:34); and, in the consciousness that, during his earthly life, he had perfectly fulfilled his high vocation, he said, in his prayer to his heavenly Father at the Last Supper: “I have glorified thee upon the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.”

(John 17:4.) But Jesus also wished, by his earthly life, to teach all men how they should live in order to love and serve the true God, and thus become worthy of eternal life. We have, in Jesus, a model and a pattern of what our conduct towards God and our neighbor should be. The life of Jesus should, therefore, be the rule by which we measure all our actions; wherefore, he himself tells us: "Take up my yoke upon you, and learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart: and you shall find rest to your souls." (Matth. 11:29.) And, again, (as an example of fraternal charity), on the eve of his Passion, when he humbly and lovingly condescended to wash the feet of his disciples, he said to them and to us: "I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also." (John 13:15.) If the whole aim of Jesus during his earthly career was to leave us an example, we are all, then, strictly obliged to imitate him in his holy life.

2. Since we are Christians it is not enough that we serve god according to the common dictates of reason, we must serve him according to the precepts, the spirit, and the example of Jesus. Christ expressly says: "I am the way." (John 14:6.) What else could he mean by this expression than to say: He who would seek to find the right road to heaven, must tread the path which I tread; that is, he must practice the manner of life which I observe; he must model his life after my example—otherwise, he will never reach my heavenly kingdom. This agrees perfectly with what he said upon another occasion: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Matth. 16:24.) In order to gain the prize, we must imitate Jesus even in his labors and sufferings, as St. Peter writes: "Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example, that you should follow his steps." (Pet. 2:21.) Finally, listen to the words of St. Paul to the Romans, concerning the necessity of imitating the holy life of Jesus: "Whom he foreknew, he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his son." (Rom. 8:29.) What is meant by being "conformable to the image of his Son"? It means that we should make Jesus our model in all our thoughts, words, and deeds, and thus, conform our lives to his holy life. This, my dear Christians, is what you must *learn* from the life of Jesus; now, listen to what you must *do* in order to imitate it.

II. What must we do in order to derive benefit from the life of Christ? We must, above all, follow the example of Jesus, as far as our state of life permits. It is true, that we can not do all the marvels that he did; yet, this divine life embraces such an abundant variety of virtues that every one, the humblest as well as the most exalted, the poor as well as the rich, may draw from it all that is practicable for his condition.

1. Meditate assiduously and frequently upon the life of Jesus; place it before you as a mirror, in which you may see your defects and your manifold shortcomings. Or, still better—do like the artist who wishes to paint the portrait of a man; he looks steadfastly at the face and figure of his sitter; then, he paints awhile; then he compares his work with the original to see if his drawing is correct; if he finds any defects, he goes to work industriously to repair them; he looks again and again at his subject and his work, in order to detect what is wanting in the latter to a perfect copy; and he takes the greatest pains to faithfully represent the original. Place before you, in the same manner, the virtues of Jesus—his humility, patience, poverty, obedience, meekness, charity, zeal for the honor of God, and for the salvation of mankind. Recall his behavior in persecutions and sufferings; compare your conduct with his; and you will soon discover what you must alter, and what you must add, if you would make your life a perfect reflection of that of Christ.

2. Then, follow Jesus openly, before every one, without shame or fear. What! will you blush to imitate the life of Jesus? Is that divine life of a nature to draw down scorn upon you when you endeavor to copy it? Ah! there are many who thus regard it! But, it is of these that Jesus said: “He that shall deny me before men, shall be denied before the angels of God.” (Luke 12:9.) No, dearly beloved, the life of Christ is the holiest and most glorious of all exemplars; and every honor is as nothing in comparison with the honor of being a true follower of Jesus. Follow him courageously and magnanimously, for, behold, if you take him as a model for your imitation, there will not be wanting those who will mock and deride you, and endeavor to turn you aside from your holy purpose. Mark well what St. Paul writes to Timothy: “All who will live piously in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution.” (2 Tim. 3:12.) We, Christians, then must expect to endure something from men; for Christ’s road leads through many tribulations, and, above all, through the scorn and mockery of the world. Pay no attention to the opinion of the majority. Zealous, pious Christians are always in the minority in this wicked world. “Many are called,” says Jesus, “but few chosen,” (Matth. 20:16); and in another place, he calls his own “a *little* flock.” (Luke 12:32.) O, how mistaken are those who use the common excuses: “So and so do thus”; or, “The majority do this”; or, “I am not alone in this!” O, accursed delusions of the devil, by which multitudes permit themselves to be deceived! The thing that is agreeable to the many, is always suspicious; for it is only with the few that we find justice, virtue, and the kingdom of God. If we take sides with the majority, we may be almost sure that we are not in the right path. This doctrine

was taught by Jesus, when he sorrowfully exclaimed: "Enter ye in at the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction; and many there are who enter by it. How narrow is the gate, and straight is the way which leadeth to life; and few there are who find it." (Matth. 7:13-14.) Therefore, do not consider the *many wicked*, but the *few just*, and imitate the latter, saying: "These do not this, or that; if these can do this good work, I also will try to do it." But, above all things, fix your attention upon that model of all justice—the sacred life of Christ, and do not turn aside one iota from him; for as he is the Way, so also is he the Truth and the Life; the Way which leads in truth to an eternal Life of happiness.

Peroration.—Having formed this resolution, return from the adoration of the Divine Infant in the crib to your homes and your occupations; and as this Child grew "in wisdom, and age, and grace, with God and men," (Luke 2:52), so may you also daily and zealously increase in the knowledge and the imitation of the life of Jesus! May you, one day, have the happiness of following Jesus at his last Advent upon earth, when he shall come, not as a helpless infant lying on rough straw in a cold stable, but clothed with majesty and glory, and surrounded by all his Angels and Saints. In the ranks of those glorified spirits, may we be found, when the just Judge of the living and the dead shall pronounce sentence upon all mankind, in the day of General Judgment! Amen.

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

CHRISTIAN UNITY.

“Behold, this child is set for the ruin, and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted.” (Luke 2:34.)

These are the words of holy Simeon when he held the new-born Saviour in his arms, and, (not without tears,) reflected that multitudes would derive little or no benefit from the birth of Christ. It is easy to conceive that our Redeemer is set for the salvation and the resurrection of those who believe in him and keep his commandments ; but why for the destruction of many in Israel ? Because many will contradict him in the doctrines of faith, and in the works of faith. These are the pagans, Jews, Turks, etc., who, notwithstanding his wonderful miracles, will not confess him to be the true Son of God.

These are, also, those Christians who are either separated from the true Church, or who, as nominal members of that Church, contradict him by their actions, and live as if ignorant of his, the doctrines. Our Saviour recommends nothing so much as Christian unity, and, to-day, we will do well to consider :

- I. *The necessity for Christian unity ; and*
- II. *The means of preserving Christian unity.*

I. Christian unity is necessary

1. *For the preservation of Catholic Christianity in general ; and*
2. *For the needs of each individual Christian.*

I. St. Paul thus forcibly admonishes all Christians : “ Be careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” And why ? Because you are all “ one body, and one Spirit ; as you are called in one hope of your vocation.” (Ephes. 4 : 3, 4.) As in the case of the body, the human soul can not animate an amputated limb, so, also, the divine Spirit can not animate one who is not united, in the bonds of peace, to the body of the Church. “ Give not place to the devil,” (Ephes. 4 ; 27,) writes St. Paul to the Ephesians ; and St. Chrysostom, commenting on this passage, says : “ So long as the stones of an edifice are firmly united together, there are no gaps in its walls ; but as soon as a fissure makes its appearance, the whole building is in danger. Thus, also, as soon as Satan succeeds in making a trifling division among the members of the Church of Christ, he endeavors to

rush in, like a roaring torrent, to destroy the whole structure. How many sad examples of such schisms have we not known, which in the beginning, like a glimmering spark, hidden under the ashes, were esteemed of no importance, but which, afterwards, broke out into a devouring conflagration ! How truly did holy Simeon prophesy concerning our Saviour : "This child is set for the ruin of many, and for a sign which shall be contradicted—!"

2. It is not enough, however, that we always seek to preserve the unity of Catholic doctrine. As we are all composed of one body and one spirit, and as we are all called to one and the same vocation ; *we must, by every means in our power, endeavor to preserve Christian peace and harmony among ourselves.*" He can not be one with Christ, who is at variance with his neighbor," says St. Augustine ; "for he is not the God of dissension, but of peace." (1. Cov. 14 : 33.) We are not in a condition to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, when we cherish ill-feeling towards our neighbor. St. Gregory says, that those who are at variance should be admonished for certain, that even although they should possess many other great virtues, they can not grow in spirit if they fail to be reconciled to their neighbor ; for it is written : "The fruits of the spirit are charity, joy, peace," etc. (Gal. 5 : 20.) Hence, he who troubles himself little about keeping peace, can not bring forth the fruits of the Holy Ghost. On this account, St. Paul says : "Whereas, there is among you envying and contention, are you not carnal, and walk according to man ?" It is also written : "With them that hated peace, I was peaceable." So you see, that God does not dwell in souls where there is no peace. Woe, alas ! to those hearts which are not fit tabernacles for the Lord ; from whom God must hold himself aloof, because they depart from him ! What fate can they expect ? "Behold, they that go far from thee shall perish : thou hast destroyed all them that are disloyal to thee." (Ps. 72 : 27.)

II. He who has a firm intention of maintaining Christian unity must

1. *Be assiduous to preserve peace in his own conscience ; and*
2. *Endeavor to promote peace with his neighbor.*

1. St. Bernard exhorts us to be assiduous in preserving harmony in our own souls. "If a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom can not stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house can not stand." (Mark 3: 24, 25.) The conscience must be well disposed toward God, if we hope to have peace with ourselves ; for "who hath resisted him, and hath had peace ?" (Job, 9 : 4.) "The wicked

are like the raging sea, which can not rest ; and the waves thereof cast up dirt and mire." How can he who is not at peace with himself, preserve unity with his neighbor ? " There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord God," but they have " destruction and unhappiness in their ways ; and the way of peace they have not known." (Ps. 13 : 3.) On the contrary, the Psalmist says : " Much peace have they that love thy law " ; and what kind of peace ?—" The peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding ;" (Phil. 4 : 7); such a peace as the world can not give. Our Saviour says to all his faithful followers : " Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you : not as the world giveth, do I give to you." (John 14 : 27.) As though he would say : " The world gives only an external, apparent peace ; but I give an interior, true peace ; the world gives a temporal, transitory peace, but I give an everlasting and eternal peace. This peace is enjoyed by all who have a good conscience : " Justice and peace have kissed." (Ps. 84 : 11.) For, where justice, or a good conscience is, there, also, is peace, unity, and true contentment. " Do good," says St. Augustine, " and thou shalt have peace . . . Justice and peace are friends. Perhaps thou aimest at peace, but dost not strive after justice. But, if thou dost not love the friend and companion of peace, thou canst not receive peace itself." (St. Augustine in Psalm 34.)

2. He who, by keeping the commandments of God, has preserved the unity of peace in his own conscience, must also endeavor to *keep, or restore it, with his neighbor.* Hence, the Psalmist after the words : " Turn away from evil, and do good," immediately adds : " Seek after peace, and pursue it." (Ps. 33 : 15.) We must not be satisfied with a negative peace with our neighbor, but, by every possible means, we must strive after, and preserve, positive harmony with him. This simply means that we should neglect no opportunity of furthering unity ; and if peace is threatened, we should make every exertion to restore it. One must not wait until peace comes to him, but he must exert himself to gain it. " Follow peace with all men," says the Apostle, (Hebr. 12 : 14); that is, not only with those that are peaceable, but also, with those that hate peace, as the royal Prophet did : " With them that hated peace, I was peaceable." (Ps. 119 : 7.) One must remove every occasion of contention from the path of his neighbor, " lest any root of bitterness, springing up, do hinder," (Hebr. 12 : 15), Christian unity. We must not seek to be revenged. We must be humble ; for, " among the proud there are always contentions." (Prov. 13 : 10.) We must forgive injuries : in short, we must love our neighbor as ourselves. If we make this the rule of our conduct, the unity between Christians, (as well as in Christianity itself,) will be preserved unbroken.

Peroration.—May peace be with you, also, beloved Christians ! For where peace is, there is the grace of God, as the Apostle explains in his greeting to the Romans and the Corinthians at the beginning of his Epistles : “ Grace to you, and peace from God, our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Cor. 1: 2.) Not a worldly, politic, half-and-half, deceitful peace, such as the world gives, but a solid, substantial, lasting peace, proceeding from the sublime source of all eternity. St. Jerome says that there is no more miserable life than to dwell together in the body, but be divided in the spirit. Dearly Beloved ! when the Apostles received the Holy Ghost, they were all assembled together in one place ; they were united not only in body, but in spirit. Now, if you, also, wish to receive the gifts of the Holy Ghost, preserve unity in your own consciences, as well as with your neighbors. For, as the soul leaves the body when the head is separated from it, so also, the Holy Spirit departs from those who, although dwelling in a community, are yet separated from it in heart. Woe, eternal woe, to those whom the divine Spirit deserts ! Our Saviour is set, not for their resurrection, but for their destruction, and for a sign that shall be contradicted ! Amen.

SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS.

THERE IS NO REASON WHY WE SHOULD FEAR DEATH.

“Now then dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word.”
(Luke 2:29.)

This is the last Sunday of the year. It is but natural and reasonable that, at the end of the year, we should look back upon our past life with an impartial eye, and examine ourselves carefully,—to the end that in the new year we may avoid old errors and correct past mistakes. The year 1887 has put a period to the lives of millions of men. What happened to them this year, may happen to us next year. One year, one day, shall certainly be our last. We must die, and it is fearful to die, because an eternity of happiness or misery depends on death. Let us then fear sin, for it is sin that makes death terrible. Very few desire death ; death is an unwelcome guest, because it is sweet to live. Some may, sometimes, wish for death, but it is only when they are in trouble ; they are not in earnest. In the Gospel of to-day, however, we meet with a man who really was in earnest about it. It is Simeon, who, far from fearing death, longed for it as a friend. What blessing did this holy man find in death to make it the object of his desires ? The blessing which faith promises—a blessing so great that it makes *life unwelcome*, and *death desirable*. I know that you fear death—every one fears it, because the separation of the soul from the body is so unnatural. Death is an evil, and no blessing considered in a worldly point of view ; it is the loss of every thing that we possess. We would be really thankful to him who would take away this fear of death. Now, please, listen to me with undivided attention, and I will console you. We need not fear death, because from it no real evil ensues.

1. Death is a punishment of sin, if you speak of it as it was before the Redemption by Jesus Christ. But if you mean death after it was conquered by him in the sacrifice of the Cross, I deny that it is justifiable to fear death as a punishment. On the contrary, I say that to the Christian, death is a blessing for which he ought to long. Hear the reasons. If I were to ask some of you which was greater, the damage caused by Adam's sin, or the blessing bestowed on us in consequence of the Redemption by Jesus Christ, what would you answer ? Of course, that the latter is far greater. You would not, and could not,

give another answer, since Jesus Christ has not only repaired the damage caused by Adam's sin, but infinitely enriched us. You have heard the *Exulted* in Holy Week, when the Church sings : " O happy guilt of Adam, which was the occasion of having so great a Redeemer ! " Now, if this is true, what is the compensation for the damage caused by sin, since, notwithstanding our Redemption by Jesus Christ, we are subject to so many hardships, and afflictions, as well as to death ? I am to give a plain, and, I hope, satisfactory answer. If Adam had not sinned, we should have led a quiet life, free from tribulations, through many centuries, and at last, without tasting death, we should have been translated, body and soul, into heaven. Now, hear the blessing by Jesus Christ. He would not deliver us from the tribulations and death caused by sin—(God did not make death, it came afterwards through sin)—but he has made them the means of speedily obtaining that eternal happiness, which, without Adam's sin, we should have obtained only by a long, long sojourn on earth. Oh, if we could comprehend this blessing, how great, how heartfelt, would be our thanks for this inestimable blessing ! It is quite certain, that the greatest punishment to the souls in Purgatory is the delay of the Beatific Vision. Should we not, then, with the Apostle, consider death as a gain ?

2. I hear somebody say that he fears death because it robs him of his life and all earthly goods. Where is the traveler who would not fear to pass a road where he knows that he will certainly be robbed by highwaymen ? This comparison, however, is lame. For robbers impoverish a traveler, whilst death enriches us. If somebody should deprive you of your old coat and replace it by a new one, would you fear such a robber ? Is not death this kind of robber ? He takes away temporal life, to replace it by eternal life ; he despoils us of the miserable goods of this world that we may gain the infinite goods of heaven. If we take this view of death the word of St. Paul will be applicable to us : " You receive with joy the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and permanent substance." (Hebr. 10: 34.)

3. *The bitter separation of body and soul, and the subsequent lamentable condition of the body appear to many sufficient motives for fearing death.* But are we not assured by our holy Faith, that the soul will return on the day of the general resurrection to be reunited with the same body ? Besides, death takes the soul out of a land of misery, to transplant her into her new fatherland where she will enjoy eternal peace and infinite delight in the embrace of her heavenly Father, in society of the Angels and Saints, her friends and brethren. True, your body will return to dust, but it will rise again. If some one would destroy your

poor hut to build you a magnificent palace instead, would you take such a benefactor for your enemy? Such a benefactor is death.

Somebody may say to me: “*You are right, in so far as you speak of a good and holy death. If we were sure of dying the death of the just, we would have no fear of death.*” I understand you: you, no doubt, have assigned the strongest reason, why death should be feared. Nevertheless even this reason is not good and sound, and will not stand the test. What renders death an evil death? You answer: Sin. Then it is sin, not death, that is to be feared; for the bitterness of death by no means originates from death, but from sin. “*The sting of death is sin.*” (1 Cor. 15: 56.) Would you be, says St. Augustine, without fear of death? Live in the fear of God; lead a virtuous life. A sinful life is followed by an evil death. Strange to say, all men fear death as the greatest calamity, but few fear a sinful life, the cause of an evil death. All means are employed to keep off death, though every one knows that death is inevitable; but very little is done to keep off an evil death, though it is in the power of everybody to prevent this greatest of all evils.

5. You have yet another evasion left: “*You say you fear death on account of the uncertainty as to whether or not you will die an evil death.*” What is the truth about this uncertainty? Do you suppose that a good and happy death is a game of hazard? Far from it. There is an uncertainty respecting the just man, and an uncertainty respecting the sinner. The just man enjoys no absolute certainty, although he is morally certain of dying a happy death, for which reason his mind is quiet. The uncertainty of the sinner, on the contrary, is terrifying, because founded on the exceedingly great probability of dying the death of the sinner of which it is written: “*The death of the evil is very evil.*” (Ps. 33: 22.) Remember the parables of the foolish virgins and the barren fig-tree. Respecting those who live in the fear of God, it is written: “*With him that feareth the Lord, it shall go well in the latter end, and in the day of his death he shall be blessed.*” (Eccles. 1: 13.) Pharaoh’s chief butler and chief baker were in the same dungeon with Joseph of Egypt. How different must have been the feelings with which they saw the day approach, when they were to leave the dungeon, the one to be restored to his former position, the other to have his head cut off! In like manner the impenitent sinner fears the day when he has to leave the dungeon of his body; the innocent or penitent sinner, to whom God has promised eternal happiness, looks forward to this day with joyfulness, saying with the Psalmist: “*Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name,*” (Ps. 141: 8,) and with the Apostle: “*I have a desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ.*” (Phil. 1: 23.)

6. *There is yet another cause why death is said to be dreadful : I MEAN THE PERILOUS STRUGGLE WITH THE DEVIL.* I reply : If you speak of those who, all their lives, were in the habit of yielding to the attacks of the devil, I am more than willing to concede that they have sufficient reason to fear death. If you speak of those who were wont to resist his temptations, I concede that they have sometimes a dreadful final struggle with the reprobate angels, but I deny that one of them ever succumbed in the combat. The servant of Eliseus the prophet, rising early, went out and saw an army round about the city, the horses and the chariots, and he told the man of God saying : "Alas ! alas ! alas ! my Lord, what shall we do ?" (The king of the Syrians had sent an army to capture the prophet.) Eliseus answered : "Fear not, there are more with us, than with them ;" and after a short prayer, he showed him the heavenly army sent by God to his assistance. In the same way, every man of God is protected in his last struggle by the Angels and Saints. "The Lord is my helper : and I will look over my enemies." (Ps. 117 : 7.) "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able." (1 Cor. 10 : 13.)

It is true, that some saintly persons have felt fear and manifested great anguish at the approach of death, but they were few when compared with the thousands of holy persons who have died with a smile on their mouths, and their hearts cheerful. God permits some things to happen, to warn sinners. If these things are done in the green wood, what shall happen to the dry ? If the just man shall scarcely be saved, where shall the wicked and the sinner appear ?

Jesus Christ is the conqueror of death. To keep far away from you the fear of death, strive for the friendship of Jesus by frequently receiving worthily his Body and Blood in the Blessed Eucharist, and pray for a holy and happy end. For this purpose have recourse to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, for it has never been heard that any client of Mary was forsaken, or died an unhappy death. Thus you take your Saviour not merely into your arms, but also into your heart ; and at your last hour you will confidently say with Simeon : "Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word, in peace : because my eyes have seen thy salvation." Amen.

J. B. CAMPAGELLI.

NEW YEAR'S EVE.

APPROPRIATE THOUGHTS FOR THE LAST DAY OF THE YEAR.

“The suspicion of them hath deceived many, and hath detained their minds in vanity.” (Eccles. 3 : 26.)

The last hours of the Old Year hasten rapidly to an end ; and, although the beginning of the New is close at hand, its events, as yet, are shrouded in impenetrable obscurity. Another important epoch in our life is about to close ; and it behooves us to imitate the merchant who, to-day, takes an account of stock, and balances his books, in order to ascertain the profits and losses of the past twelve months. Taking an account of the important business of salvation, each one of us should ask himself : “Have I spent the past year in such a manner as to increase my store of Christian virtues ? Have I squared my accounts with my divine Master, with that great God, who, perhaps, before the expiration of another year, may summon me before his judgment-seat ?” How shall we answer these questions ? Self-love will be inclined to answer in the affirmative ; but “many things are . . . above the understanding of men, and the suspicion of them hath deceived many, and hath detained their minds in vanity.” Dearly beloved, if you judge yourselves impartially, you will find that you have little cause for self-complacency, or for esteeming yourselves upright and perfect, for you will discover that

I. Your sins are not so small, nor

II. Your virtues so great

as you may imagine.

I. Many who are not honest in their examination of conscience, see, in themselves, only venial sins, which are not of much importance, and pray after the manner of the Pharisee : “O God, I give thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, nor such as this publican.” (Luke 18 : 11.) But, are there no other sins beside those of glaring injustice and gross impurity ? Yes, unhappy man, your hands may be free from actual robbery—but, have you not cherished in your heart a robber’s desires, whenever you looked with envious and covetous eyes upon the more abundant temporal goods and advantages of your neighbor ? What, too, of those dishonest practices in your business, which you denom-

inate as means to increase your profits, but which the Eternal Judge calls sins—yea, sins of robbery? And what, O father and mother, of the want and misery you prepare for yourselves or your unhappy offspring, by your intemperance, gambling, extravagance, useless expenditures, or idleness?

You say you are no murderer. I grant you, that your hands are not stained with your brother's blood—but, yet, your slanderous tongue kills the reputation of your brother, causes the death of his good name; your seductive words destroy the innocence of youth; your impious speeches against religion and the Church, slaughter the pious reverence of your fellow Christians; your wicked example has led many to destruction!

You boast that you have not committed adultery—but do not these severe words of Christ, nevertheless, apply to you: “I say unto you, that whoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart—?” (Matth. 5: 28.) You say that you have never betrayed innocence, never brought to an untimely grave the unhappy parents of a violated daughter; but, have you not, by long acquaintance, secret meetings, and the impure words and actions which accompany them, given free entrance to thoughts which, in the sight of God, if not in that of men, have robbed your victim of her purity?

Behold, thus may many sins be hidden in the secret recesses of the heart, of which, perhaps, you are not aware!

II. Thus, also, our virtues, at the best, are not so great, nor so numerous, as to justify us in any self-complacency or pride. Like the Pharisee, many Christians of the present day are forever extolling the small amount of apparent good they do. They say: I go every day to Mass; I receive the Sacraments so many times a month; I belong to such and such Confraternities; I perform every day these, or those devotions; I give abundant alms; I bring up my children very strictly, etc. Very good! I do not censure all these things, as Jesus did not condemn the good deeds of the Pharisee. But, beloved Christians, while you do all this, are there not other, and, perhaps, higher duties, which you neglect? Or, may not your actions be performed through an impure or imperfect motive which renders them altogether useless? Let us see!

You go every day to Mass, and say many special prayers—but, with how much recollection and devotion? Might not God, perhaps, say of you, as he said of the Jews: “These people honor me with the lips, while their hearts are far from me”? You often receive the Sacraments—but, where are the fruits of these holy actions? Do you not remain always the same sinner? You belong to many Confrater-

nities and Sodalities,—but, do you also belong to the great brotherhood of charity, which, having one Father in heaven, binds its members to a sincere, mutual love and forbearance. Is not your heart filled with dislike, hatred, or enmity, thus rendering null the holy intentions of your Confraternities ! You give alms,—but how ? Always in a kindly spirit, so that the poor may not find the bread of charity too bitter ? You give alms,—and why ? To please God, or merely to be praised by men ? You say that you bring up your children strictly ; but, in what does the strictness consist ? In this, that your children are the victims of your wrath. You punish severely trifling faults, while you overlook grave offences. Yes, if teachers or pastors point out to you the imperfections of your offspring, then, you fall upon them in anger, and your strict education is changed at once into a perverted indulgence of your spoiled and self-willed children. Again, others plume themselves upon practices of bodily mortification, upon watching and fasting. These are praiseworthy ; but test them, and see if the Lord may not apply to you the words which we find in Isaia : (58 : 6-8.) “Is not this rather the fast that I have chosen ? loose the bands of wickedness ; undo the bundles that oppress ; let them that are broken, go free ; and break asunder every burden. Deal thy bread to the hungry ; and bring the needy and the harborless into thy house : when thou shall see one naked, cover him, and despise not thy own flesh. Then shall thy light break forth as the morning and thy justice shall go before thy face ; and the glory of the Lord shall gather thee up,” —that is, the Lord will admit thee into his glory.

Peroration.—Time does not permit me to continue further this self-examination of the Christian, at the end of the year ; but let the little that has been said, suffice to show you your whole duty on this point. Continue in this manner to examine all the actions of the past year, and the self-knowledge thus gained will preserve you from pride and vanity, and will produce in you that true humility, which is the growth of divine grace. “The greater thou art, the more humble thyself in all things ; and thou shalt find grace before God : for great is the power of God alone : and he is honored by the humble.” (Eccles. 3 : 20-21.) On the other hand, Jesus tells us how God will exalt the humble : “Who-soever shall exalt himself, shall be humbled : and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.” (Matth. 23 : 12.) Amen.

FEAST OF THE CIRCUMCISION.

THE HOLY NAME OF JESUS.

“After eight days were accomplished that the child should be circumcised, his name was called Jesus.” (Luke 2: 21.)

The Evangelist here describes the concomitants of an event, without describing the event itself. He does not tell us that our Saviour was circumcised, but that the time had arrived when he should be circumcised. The Fathers of the Church explain this method of expression by saying that the Evangelist was bewildered by the contemplation of so great a mystery. Though he dared not deny the fact, yet St. Luke could not comprehend how Circumcision, which was a law for sinners, could be submitted to by Sanctity itself. Hence, he recorded the mystery as discreetly as possible, without describing it in plain words: “His name was called Jesus;” it being understood that the giving of a name was part of the ceremony of Circumcision. The name which our Redeemer received in Circumcision, represents to us

- I. *His humanity, and*
- II. *His divinity.*

I. This Holy Name shows us in Christ's humanity :

1. *A Redeemer, and*
2. *The Father of the world to come.*

1. Our redemption was the object of the Incarnation of the Son of God. The work of redemption began with his birth, and was completed with his Circumcision; but “with him,” there was not only a satisfactory, but also, “a plentiful redemption.” (Ps. 129: 7.) And that which was sufficient for our redemption, could not satisfy the superabundant love wherewith he redeemed us. It was not enough to purify us from sin, he would further wash “us from our sins in his own blood.” (Apoc. 1: 5.) O, true and faithful love! “There is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved,” (Acts 4: 12,) but the name of Jesus, our Redeemer. Because “he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death,” or, (which is the same thing,) because he has redeemed us by the lowly death of the cross: “God also hath exalted him, and hath given him a name which is above every name,” (Philipp. 2: 9;) a name which

“is as oil poured out,” (Cant. 1 : 2,) and which reconciles heaven and earth. A name, through which Circumcision became a sign of the covenant between God and man ; a name, above all other names. For although some, like Josue, have borne the name Jesus on account of delivering a nation from temporal ruin, or establishing therein a temporal peace, yet, as applied to our Redeemer, the name of Jesus is, in an especial manner, more venerable than all other names, even as eternal salvation is superior to mere temporal deliverance, and universal peace is preferable to any petty local peace.

2. The humility of our Saviour was shown forth in his birth, but still more clearly in his Circumcision. In his Nativity, he assumed the nature of man, while in his Circumcision, he descended to the level of a sinner. “ Wherefore God also hath also exalted him, and hath given him a name which is above every name,” because, in our Saviour, he has shown us “ the Father of the world to come,” (Isai. 9 : 6,) as Abraham, through the rite of Circumcision, became “ the father of many nations.” Truly, in the beginning, the Church was “ like to a grain of mustard-seed, . . . which, indeed, is the least of all seeds ; but when it is grown up, it is greater than any herbs, and becometh a tree.” (Matth. 13 : 31-32.) As “ a rod out of the root of Jesse,” it acquired so many branches, that it became the trunk of a great tree. (Isai. 11 : 1.) “ In Christ Jesus, I have begotten you through the Gospel,” (Cor. 4 : 15;) that is, I have made you sons of Christ, says St. Paul. All those who were baptized in Christ, by his Apostle, “ to them he gave power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in his name.” (John 1 : 12.) The baptized could say to him : “ Thou art my father,” (Ps. 88 : 27;) and he might reply to the newly-baptized : “ Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee ; ” (Ps. 2 : 7;) —a generation which is honorable to man as well as to Christ ; to man, because from being a son of Adam, he becomes a son of God, and to our Saviour, because, through the increase of his sons, he receives the glorious name of Father of all future generations.

II. In the name of Jesus, we have seen that of our Redeemer, and now, in our Redeemer, we may contemplate

1. *Our God* ; and, in this God,
2. *Our Teacher and Guide*.

1. That which in the Old Law was so “ terrible and holy,” (Ps. 98 : 3,) has become to us, under the New, most lovely and amiable, through the adorable name of Jesus. Formerly, God spoke to man in thunder and lightning ; but in these latter days, he has spoken to us

through his Son, whom he has given “ for a witness to the people, for a leader and a master to the Gentiles.” (Isai. 55 : 4.) “ Faith cometh by hearing,” (Rom. 10 : 16;) and we would not know the truth, if it had not been preached to us. Now, “ In the beginning was the Word ;” (John 1 : 1;) but we could not yet hear this Word : for “ the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (*Ibid.*) The divine Word had not yet been revealed to us by any living evidence. We could, as yet, only contemplate him in his divine essence, but we could neither see, nor hear, him. But when “ The Word was made flesh,” (*Ibid.* 14;) then, we had the first Preacher and Teacher of the New Testament among us, in the form of a helpless babe in the crib of Bethlehem. Until now, the world had been in darkness ; but, in the Son of God, is born to us “ the light of the world ;” (John 8 : 12;) “ a light to the revelation of the Gentiles,” (Luke 2 : 32,) “ the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world.” (John 1 : 9.) But our Saviour was not a Teacher from all eternity, in the same sense that he was the Word from all eternity : he only became our Teacher from the time that “ the Word was made flesh.” In the same manner that a man makes known to another his inmost sentiments by the words of his mouth, so also the Eternal Father makes known his divine will by his Son, Jesus Christ. “ Hear ye him ! ” he says. (Mark 9 : 6.) “ He will teach you all truth.” (John 16 : 13.) We will now see *how* he taught.

2. “ Jesus began to do and to teach.” (Acts 1 : 1.) Here are two things, *doing* and *teaching* ; and as the doing comes before the teaching, this indicates that he was already a teacher before he began to speak. His doctrine did not consist in many words, but in the only Word, which is himself, as we learn from his example. “ I have given you an example,” are his words, “ that as I have done to you, so you do also.” (John 13 : 15.) He was our Teacher, but, at the same time, our Guide. Man could not contradict this Teacher, because he proved the truth of his doctrine more by deeds than by words. Can there be more convincing proofs than those which we, not only hear with our ears, but which, before hand, we have seen with our eyes, and touched with our hands ? That which he taught in his sermons, he had before performed in his life. If we contemplate our Teacher in his Circumcision, we shall see that he already begins to practice what he afterwards preached. In his Circumcision, he teaches us humility, mortification, obedience,—in short, a moral circumcision, of which the Apostle says : “ The circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit,” (Rom. 2 : 29,) and which is the most necessary for us, if we would avoid evil and do good.

Peroration.—“ *His name was called Jesus.*” O mysterious name ! What

will it profit us if, while we acknowledge him who bears it as our Redeemer and our Father, we do not, at the same time, obey and follow him as our Teacher and our Guide? What shall we gain by calling him a Redeemer, if he is not our own personal Redeemer? Alas! how many will there be whom Jesus, as a Redeemer, shall have ransomed from eternal slavery, but whom, as a Judge, he will be obliged to condemn to everlasting torments! Perhaps we may be among the number of those unhappy ones. I trust not. In the meantime, let each one examine his own conscience, and see if he has good grounds for believing that he is in the state of grace. Let all here present unite with St. Charles Borromeo in the earnest prayer: "O, good Jesus! thou art come into this world in order to be my Saviour. Thou hast, to-day, with the first shedding of thy precious blood, begun to be a Saviour to me: be then a Saviour to me, now, and for all eternity!" Amen.

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

“For the grace of God our Saviour hath appeared to all men, instructing us, that renouncing impiety and worldly desires, we should live soberly, and justly, and piously in this world.” (Titus 2: 11-12.—)

Who can imagine, or reckon up, the varied and myriad thoughts and plans, which to-day, the first of the New Year, engross the hearts and minds of men? But this much I may venture positively to assert, that the vast majority of these thoughts and plans turn upon temporal and earthly concerns. Each one seeks and hopes for health, good fortune, happiness, in the New Year; yet, dearly beloved! we are not simply men, we are also Christians, and, as such, we have a higher and holier duty than the seeking of mere earthly happiness. This elevated duty is connected with the appearance of Jesus upon earth; and consequently, it enforces on us the obligation of believing in the newborn Saviour, the Incarnate Son of God. The Church, in short, addresses to us, to-day, the words of St. Paul to his beloved disciple Titus, to whom he writes:

“The grace of God our Saviour hath appeared to all men, instructing us, that renouncing impiety, and worldly desires, we should live soberly, and justly, and piously in this world.”

We now know the duties incumbent upon Christians; but how shall we perform them. The means thereto are given to us in prayer, in the use of the holy Sacraments, in a faithful reliance on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and in the consideration of the benefits conferred upon us in our creation, which should move us to sentiments of *gratitude* and *obedience*. To-day, we will make this last point the subject of our consideration; and, at this beginning of the New Year, we will cast a backward glance upon the very beginning of our existence. I shall, therefore, speak

I. *Of the benefits of our creation; and*

II. *Of how those who wish to lead Christian lives may apply these benefits to their own souls.*

I. First, let us consider why God created man. Man was created to serve God here, and to be happy with him forever, hereafter. Thus, God made man in order to give him a share in his own splendor, glory, and happiness. “Thou hast made him (man,) a little less than the Angels; thou hast crowned him with glory and honor: and hast set him over the works of thy hands.” (Ps. 8: 6, 7.) I know of nothing that

can more fully express the blessing of our creation than this: Not only has God created man, but he has willed that he should be the most perfect, exalted, and happy of all his creatures upon earth; that man should not only see the glory of God, but that he should even have a share in it.

1. How did God create man? He gave him a body most perfectly adapted to all his needs. Consider the construction of the bodies of all quadrupeds, birds, fishes, and reptiles. The human body has all the traits which the greatest of these possess, besides being endowed with an immortal soul, to which, (if separated from it for a while) the body of the faithful Christian will, one day, be reunited, to live an eternal life of never-ending happiness. "For, if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them who have slept through Jesus, God will bring with him," says St. Paul. (1. Thess. 4: 13.)

Let us now consider the soul. It is the very image of God. It has so many powers and capabilities, that we may say of it that it is intimately related to God. What an honor do we not consider it, to be related to a distinguished man, a prince, or a sovereign. But through your creation, by receiving an immortal soul, you are related to the King of kings, to the mighty Lord of lords—your soul is derived from the Almighty Monarch of heaven and earth, and shares in his essence and nature. Holy Writ says: "God created man to his own image; to the image of God he created him," (Gen. 1: 27,) and this is confirmed by the Apostle when he says: "Be ye renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, who, according to God, is created in justice, and holiness of truth." (Ephes. 4: 23.) I know not what further proof you can desire, in order to establish the truth of the benefits conferred upon us by God in our creation.

2. Ponder still further *why* God created you—what it was that moved him *to call you, in particular*, forth from nothingness. Perhaps you merited this grace? Perhaps, you prayed for it? That is not possible, since you had not yet begun to exist. Or, perhaps, God foresaw that you would be very grateful to him for the benefits of creation, that you would lead pious lives, that you would love him above all things, and honor him as he deserves? On the contrary, behold what sinners you are! Truly, if it had depended upon your correspondence with his goodness, then you would never have been in the world, for God knew full well that you would be ungrateful to him, that you would sin against him, rebel against, and disobey, his law; he foresaw all your offences; and notwithstanding, he did not create you as irrational animals, but he made you rational human beings. Ah, I know of no other answer to the question, *Why*

did God create man?—than this; God created man out of pure love and mercy, as he himself tells us by the mouth of the prophet Jeremias: “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee.” (Jer. 31: 3.)

Consider again: When God created you, he chose you from myriads of others whom he might have created, but did not, and who, perhaps, would have loved and served him far better than you; who would have infinitely surpassed you in faith, wisdom, and sanctity—yet, behold, while he has not created these, (and perhaps never will,) he has nevertheless made *you*. Why is this? How many, in our place, dearly beloved, would have burned with an ardent love of God, like a St. Francis or a St. Theresa; would have been jealous in the performance of all good works, like a St. Vincent de Paul or a St. Elizabeth of Hungary! O, why are *we* in existence, instead of such heroic souls as these? It is a mystery. God is the Lord; he can create what he wills, as he wills, and when he wills. He has made you, and not others, because he wished to give you a share in his mercy. O, who can fully comprehend the benefits of creation? Have you frequently reflected seriously on this subject? St. Chrysostom says truly of that Christian whose life is in direct contradiction to the ends of his creation: “Why should I recognize you as a Christian, when you are not even a man? You kick backwards, like the donkey; you are obstinate, like the ox; you notice only evil, like the camel; you neigh after females, like the horse; pamper your belly, like the bear; steal and rob, like the wolf; cherish anger, like the serpent; bite, like the scorpion; you are cunning, like the fox; you carry around you the poison of evil, like the viper; and you fall upon your brother, like a devil—how then can I recognize you as a man?” Although these reproaches of St. Chrysostom may seem harsh, they, nevertheless, contain a sorrowful truth. But how shall we, who desire to lead Christian lives, profit by the benefits of creation? The answer to this shall form the second point of our instruction.

II. If you would derive profit from the grace of creation, you must

1. Acknowledge the magnitude of the benefits conferred in your creation, and frequently meditate upon them. When St. Ignatius began his conversion, he withdrew into the solitary cave of Manresa, and there, meditating upon the benefits conferred upon him in his creation, he first began to understand why he was placed in this world. This consideration caused him to conclude: “Since I have received body and soul, and all I have from God,—in return, I will offer up to him, in gratitude, my body and soul, and all that I possess.” St. Bernard, too, whenever he became too much engrossed in temporal affairs, was

accustomed to ask himself : “ Bernard, why have you come into this world ? ” Let us follow these examples, and frequently reflect on the end of our creation, and we shall not easily overlook the fact that we are placed in this world in order to serve God, and finally, to reach heaven. This thought will animate us to direct all our desires and efforts towards God and his heavenly kingdom ; and we shall then be as sure of acting rightly in all the events of life, as we are certain that the sun-dial can never go wrong, inasmuch as it is always regulated by the material sun, and we, by the eternal Sun of Justice himself.

2. Reflect further that God, who has made you, has the fullest right and title to you, and to all that you possess. To him, belongs your soul and body, and of both he will, one day, demand a rigorous account. You can not use either according to your own pleasure, but according to the will of God. If the owner of a garden plants a tree has he not the fullest right to the tree and its fruits ? Can he not eat of them undisputedly ? And if a farmer plants wheat in his field, has he not a right to reap the harvest, and use it for his own support ? Shall God alone, have no authority over you ? Shall you refuse to him, alone, those fruits of virtue, justice, and piety, for whose production he has placed you in this world ? Truly, there are multitudes who live in this fatal delusion ! But woe to such ! for in them will be fulfilled the words : “ Every tree that yieldeth not good fruit, shall be cut down, and shall be cast into the fire.” (Matth. 7 : 19.) But you, my dear Christians, on the contrary, often reflect that God is your Master, and that his holy will must be the rule of all your actions ; and that God’s will is, as St. Paul says, “our sanctification.”

3. Finally, consider that, although you are composed of soul and body, yet the soul is the far nobler part. Therefore, you must be more solicitous for the welfare of your soul, than of your body. The soul demands our first care ; a doctrine which our Saviour inculcated in the following words : “ Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth : where the rust and the moth consume, and where thieves dig through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven ; where neither the rust nor the moth doth consume, and where thieves do not dig through nor steal. . . . Seek ye, therefore, first, the kingdom of God and his justice ; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Matth. 6 : 19-20-33.) And again : “ What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? ” (Matth. 16 : 26.) Of course, our Lord does not imply by these various passages that we must utterly neglect the care of the body. We must, indeed, look to its needs, but only so far as may serve to make it the useful servant of the soul. Clothe it, but simply, and not to gratify pride ; feed it, but temperately,

and not to indulge in gluttony and drunkenness ; make use of it for labor, and not for idleness and comfort. Above all, keep your body free from all impurity, that most frightful of all vices, which is so horrible that the Apostle says it should not even be named among Christians. So foully does it dishonor and disfigure the pure and holy image of God, that no one is more markedly the enemy of Christ, than the unchaste man or woman.

4. The consideration of the graces of creation will redound to our great advantage. Through them, we comprehend, on the one hand, the eternal love and goodness of God towards us, which should render every sacrifice easy to us ; and on the other, the high dignity of our own souls and bodies. God's holy image is stamped upon us. Dare we deface it by sins and vices ? No ; the love of God, who created us without any merit on our part, and out of pure mercy, forbids us doing any thing so terrible. We will preserve that divine image undefaced so that, when we shall be summoned to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, the Eternal Judge may recognize us for his own, and may give us a share in his glory. The constant remembrance of the end of our creation will cause us to walk before God in such holy perfection, that, at the approach of death, we shall be able to cry out, with St. Paul : " I am even now ready to be sacrificed : and the time of my dissolution is at hand. I have fought a good fight ; I have finished my course ; I have kept the faith. For the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just Judge, will render to me at that day." (2. Tim. 4 : 6-8.) Amen.

SUNDAY AFTER NEW YEAR'S DAY.

THE HOUSE OF NAZARETH.

“And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth.” (Matt. 2: 23.)

When Herod, the cruel tyrant, was dead, God sent an angel to Joseph in Egypt, admonishing him to return to his own country, in these words : “Rise, and take the child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel : for they are dead, who sought the life of the child”: and Joseph “rising up, took the child, and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.” (Matt. 2: 21, 22.) When he had passed the boundaries of the land of Israel, hearing that Archelaus reigned in Judea in the room of Herod his father, he was afraid to go thither, and being warned in sleep he retired into the parts of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, with his virgin bride and the Son of God. Let the house of Nazareth, where the Holy Family dwelt for many years, be the subject of our meditation this morning.

- I. *The house of Nazareth is a model for every Christian house.*
- II. *The house of Nazareth is a consolation to every Christian house.*

- I. *The house of Nazareth is a model for every Christian house.*

1. It was a *house of prayer*, for there never was a spot on earth whence so ardent prayer ascended into heaven, as from the house of Nazareth. There the holiest souls poured out their prayers before the Lord.—In every Christian house prayer should be the first object of solicitude. “Let nothing hinder thee from praying always” (Ecclus. 18: 22.) “Watch ye, praying at all times.” (Luke 21: 35.) O that prayers would be said in every household ! Say your morning and evening prayers. Let parents see to it that their children say their prayers in the morning and in the evening.

2. It was a *house of the fear of God*. In the house of Nazareth dwelt three holy persons, filled with the fear of God—Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Every Christian household should be filled with the fear of

God. "Fear the Lord, and serve him." (1 Kings 12: 24.) Under the roof where the fear of God prevails, no bad actions are committed, no bad words are spoken.

3. It was a *house of charity*. How tender and holy were the affections between Joseph and Mary! How burning their flames of love for Jesus! What shall we say of the love of Jesus towards his parents? Every Christian house should be permeated with true charity. "This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you." (John 15: 6.) Happy the house in which this charity rules and prevails, where husband and wife, brothers and sisters respect and love one another. All crosses are carried with ease, every yoke is sweet, every burden light. On the contrary, how melancholy is the sight of the house where this charity is wanting! A house divided against itself.

4. It was a house of *contentedness*. The house of Nazareth had no costly furniture, no splendid rooms, no exquisite meals. All was plain, simple; but the inhabitants of this house were well content with little. Such should be every house. "Be contented with little instead of much." (Ecclus. 29: 29.) In a house where everything is demanded in profusion, and complaints are heard on every trivial occasion, the spirit of Christ does not dwell. But when the members of the family are content with what God gives, though it be plain raiment, and scanty food, and when, for that little, daily thanks are offered to God, there dwells the spirit of Christ, and there you find greater happiness than in the places of kings. "The life of the laborer who is content with what he hath, shall be sweet." (Ecclus 40: 18.) "Having food, and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content, for we brought nothing into this world; and certainly we can carry nothing out." (1 Tim. 6: 7, 8.)

5. It was a house of *beneficence*. Although the Holy Family were poor, earning their bread with their hands, we may nevertheless believe that their house was a harbor and consolation for the needy. Beneficence will be met with in every Christian house. "Son, defraud not the poor of alms; and turn not away thy eyes from the poor." (Ecclus. 4: 1.) But times are hard, the income small, the poor ungrateful. Christian charity gives alms nevertheless, knowing that if the thanks of the world are not received, the reward is doubled by God. "Give alms of thy substance, and turn not away thy face from any poor person: for so it shall come to pass that the face of the Lord shall not be turned from thee. According to thy ability be merciful. If thou have much, give abundantly: if thou have little, take care even so to bestow willingly a little. . . for alms deliver from all sin,

and from death, and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness." (Tob. 4: 7-11.)

II. *The house of Nazareth is a consolation to every Christian house.*

1. In regard to *labor*. Jesus worked, Mary and Joseph worked. Is it not a great consolation to you in your labors to know that the Son of the Most High, his Virgin Mother and his pious foster-father worked for their daily bread? Labor must be in every house. "Thou shalt eat the labors of thy hands." (Ps. 127: 2.) Labor is the general allotment of man. "In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread." (Gen. 2: 19.) "Man is born to labor, and the bird to fly." (Job 5: 7.) We must bear "the burden of the day and the heats." (Matt. 20: 12.) How hard a task it is to many fathers of families to earn a living for their dear ones! At the same time, you will all perceive that labor is exceedingly acceptable to God.

2. In regard to the *inevitable afflictions in life*. There were afflictions in the house of Nazareth. Though being the delight of heaven, it had to taste the cup of bitterness. "Many are the tribulations of the just: but out of them all will the Lord deliver them." (Ps. 33: 20.) There are afflictions in every house. "Great labor is created for all men, and a heavy yoke is upon the children of Adam." (Ecclus. 40: 1.) Poverty. Sickness. Accidents. Calumny. Mournful casualties. If sadness and affliction visit your house, remember the holiest house upon which the sun was ever shining, and reflect that it was not exempt from tribulations. Amen.

JOSEPH SCHUEN.

SUNDAY AFTER NEW YEAR'S DAY.

THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY.

“Being warned in sleep, he retired into the parts of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth.” (Matt. 2: 22, 23.)

Who can meditate on the Gospel of this day without finding in the household of Nazareth a pattern for every Christian family? God, who has sanctified every state of life, places before us in Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, the highest and purest model of all Christian parents and children.

Family life in the dignity and sacredness which properly belong to it is the blessing and fruit of Christianity, one of mankind's earliest means of sanctification. From the beginning, God established the marriage state,—and, through it, family life,—as the foundation and corner-stone of human society. But the divine designs having been frustrated or destroyed by man's wickedness and impiety, the only begotten Son of God descended from heaven and made himself a member of a human family in order to purify all the families of earth from sin, and restore them to their pristine dignity. Yes, by becoming man, Christ gave to the family a higher dignity, making it, through his grace, a type of his Church.—The more an anti-Christian spirit prevails, the greater and more baneful will be its effects upon family-life. What wonder, then, that, at the present day, unbelief is sapping the very foundations of the Christian household, until we behold it tottering and crumbling before our very eyes! But, in order to consider this subject more in detail, allow me to answer for you the following questions :

- I. *What is a Christian family?*
- II. *What blessings proceed from Christian families?*

I. At the time of Christ's advent, among Jews and Gentiles, alike, the father of the family possessed absolute authority over his dependents. Not only were the servants of the household completely at the mercy of his ill-humor and caprice, but wife and children were also the helpless victims of his brutality and violence. Even the traditions of patriarchal family-life were almost extinct among the Jews. Man and woman were joined together by the parents; or the man chose

the woman for pleasure ; and she, as the head-subject or slave superintended and ruled his house, while he was absent in the pursuit of amusement, or engaged in public or private affairs. God's image, and the dignity of the wife and children completely obliterated, the very lives of the latter were in the hands of the husband and father. No earthly power or law could withhold him from putting any member of his family to death. Of what would not a man be capable in such circumstances, unrestrained by the fear of hell or the hope of heaven ?

1. Our Redeemer restored the dignity of the human race by teaching that all men are made to the image and likeness of God. It was necessary that the life of the Christian family should assume an entirely different character from that which it bore among the Jews and Gentiles. Therefore, he raised the union of man and woman to the dignity of a Sacrament, and made it a glorious type of his union with his divine spouse, the Church.

2. Woman, at once, assumes her high and holy position in the Christian family; but at the same time man loses nothing of his sublime prerogative as the representative of God therein. He is the ruler and head of his household ; and wife, children, and servants owe him obedience. It is hardly possible to emphasize his authority in stronger terms than those which the Lord God addresses to Eve immediately after the Fall : "Thou shalt be under thy husband's power, and he shall have dominion over thee." (Gen. 3 : 16.) And St. Paul says : "Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord : for the husband is the head of the wife ; as Christ is the head of the Church. Therefore, as the Church is subject to Christ ; so also let wives be to their husbands in all things." (Ephes. 5 : 22-24.)

3. But the authority rightfully awarded the Christian father and husband, should never degenerate into anything approaching tyranny or cruelty. He should see and respect God's image in his wife, children, and servants, and remember that before heaven he is no more than the humblest member of his own family. Furthermore, he must never forget that he will have to render a strict account of the use he has made of his marital power and parental authority. He is the pilot of the ship, it is true, but he must steer its course according to the orders of its supreme Master, and not according to his own caprice. His highest and holiest duty is to teach his dependents to become perfect followers of Christ by precept, but more particularly, by example. His government should resemble that of the heavenly Father who governs all his creatures with wisdom and love, in sweetness and long-suffering patience.

4. In the Christian family, next to the father and with equal rights, comes the mother,—not, as of old, given by her parents to her husband without her consent, but permitted freely to choose her spouse and partner. Before the days of Christ, all legislation ignored the rights of woman, and treated her with contempt. Christianity, alone, elevated her to her true sphere. She is, and remains, subject to her husband, for such is the will of God. But her human and Christian dignity is as high and as sacred as that of her spouse. As mother of the family, she resembles the Church, which is subject to Christ, but is, at the same time, loved by him with all the warmth and affection of a divine Heart. The most intimate communion of hearts and union of souls should exist between husbands and wives, since both are co-heirs of Christ.

5. Consider, also, the children and domestics of the Christian family. I have already portrayed to you their sad condition before the coming of Christ, when, (God's image not being recognized in them,) children and servants were completely in the power and at the mercy of their father and master. Christianity changed all this. Children became priceless treasures, truest blessings from God. In the little ones reposing on their breasts, the Christian fathers and mothers learned to reverence God's holy image ; and the end of all their efforts and most earnest endeavors was directed to train and educate them for heaven. Belonging no longer solely to the father, as was the case before Christ, children were recognized as the property of God, to whom both father and mother must render a strict account of their temporal and spiritual training.

6. Under the pagan dispensation, servants were degraded to the rank of slaves, were treated as soulless, irrational creatures, bought and sold, and even put to death at their master's pleasure ; but Christianity, by breaking the fetters of the slave, has given to servants the place which is rightfully theirs in the family. In Catholic households, the faithful servant is regarded as one of the family, and is treated and cared for with loving kindness and consideration. In return, the good domestic never fails to remember the advice of the Apostle : "Servants, obey your carnal masters with fear and trembling, in the simplicity of your heart as Christ. Not serving to the eye, as it were, pleasing men, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with a good will, doing service as to the Lord, and not to men." (Ephes. 6 : 5-7.)

7. Before Christ, the main purpose of God in the institution of the marriage state, that is, the propagation of the human race—that heaven

might be filled with Saints—was completely lost sight of. The pagans knew no higher aim than the maintenance or increase of temporal prosperity. It is true, that in Jewish families, because of the promise that the Messiah would be born of a daughter of Abraham, there remained a somewhat nobler aim; yet, even here, they were far removed from the beautiful life of a Christian family. The latter, (thanks be to God !) is a church in miniature, the continuation and completion of the work of the Redemption. The father is the head, as Christ is the head of the Church, and provides for all belonging to him. He resembles Christ who sanctifies all the members of his mystical body, and carries them in the strong arms of his grace. The mother, standing by his side, labors with him, equally solicitous that all belonging to her may be saved. The children recognize in their parents the representatives of God; the domestics, like the children, lovingly obey the voice of God in the commands of their master and mistress. If every household would fulfil its exalted mission, the earth would be peopled with Saints, and all would recognize

II. The innumerable blessings that flow to the world from the Christian family.

1. The Christian family secures the temporal and eternal happiness of each individual member. Who is more to be pitied than he who has never known the blessed influence of Christian family-life? Does not every one commiserate the homeless and friendless little ones who grow up,—like wild plants of the desert—neglected and uncared for? Without the saving influence of the Christian home, there is no solid foundation for *education or happiness*. Consider these points, and you will not fail to recognize the fact that the happiness of the individual man depends upon family life.

a. Only in the family circle is *Christian education* possible. The education of a man is a work which requires much industry and many hands. All fruit-bearing trees require cultivation. Only the trees of the forest are allowed to grow up without training and pruning. The passions with their corrupt tendencies must be extirpated, and the seed of the fear of God must be planted and fostered, in the soul of a child. To the words of the parents, must be united persevering good example, and a careful exclusion of all evil influences. If fathers and mothers are not careful, by word and example, to implant early the seeds of virtue in the souls of their children; if they do not begin at an early age, gently but firmly, to curb their rising passions, and root out their bad dispositions, they must expect to see them grow up lawless, unruly, vicious members of society.

b. Where will a man find *true happiness* if not in the bosom of his

own family. An animal is satisfied with food and drink, and when its appetite is satisfied, it lies down and sleeps. But man requires other and higher joys. He longs for a heart to beat in unison with his own ; for companions solicitous for his comfort and welfare. He longs for sympathy. He likes to be surrounded with those, who are interested in him, who feel kindly and amiably towards him, and with whom he may share all his joys and sorrows. A soul, to whom God is all in all, and who turns to him as entirely and as faithfully as the needle to the pole, may easily forego the sympathy and communion of her kind, but the majority of people require for their happiness the love and sympathy of creatures.

2. The welfare of human society depends upon well-ordered family-life, and the state or government that undermines or encroaches upon the latter works its own ruin and digs its own grave. Peace and order can be maintained only by family-life. A generation of tramps will inaugurate an era of restless rebellion or lawless anarchy. They can only be held together by the iron rod of power,—and, at any moment, are liable to burst the bonds of legal subjection or moral restraints. A man without a home is by nature a revolutionist, an anarchist. By the subversion of order and peace, he has nothing to lose, but everything to gain. The better-ordered the family-life, the greater the public peace. Is it not an alarming and repulsive feature of our modern social misery, that family ties are so easily loosened ? Everything is to be feared from those who belong to no one. They are fit tools for every kind of disorder. The vast multitude of idle, irreligious men let loose upon society, it can not be denied, is one of the crying misfortunes of our time. The earth has room enough for all, and there is bread enough for all. But homeless people are an affliction, a misfortune, a calamity. We do not fear the children,—no matter how numerous they may be—born and brought up in the home of Christian parents. But we tremble for those who, untrained, and uncared for, grow up wild, like the trees of the forest, or the beasts of the field. These, alas ! form the malignant cancer which is eating into the very heart of modern society.

Not merely does our civil welfare demand a well-ordered government, but the flourishing growth of social virtues, as well, since they are the strong pillars upon which society rests. What would the world come to if we made no sacrifices for one another, if we forgot the practice of fraternal charity, of justice, of fidelity ? These are the bonds which unite men as brethren,—the solid foundation upon which the structure of human society rests. But these virtues must be cultivated ; they do not spring forth spontaneously from the naturally sinful and selfish heart of man. Like exotics, they require careful training,

and are cultivated most successfully in Christian families. The heart of a child under the influence of family-life and the grace of God, is excited to a spirit of self-sacrifice, is taught to appreciate the pleasure of relieving the distressed, of practising charity in its manifold forms; it learns, at the same time, the value of the beautiful virtues of truth and fidelity.

3. But what shall I say of those blessings that flow from Christian families to *the Church*. They are her strength and support, and at the same time, her root and offspring. The Church has grown out of the family; and without it, the kingdom of God would be incomplete. When Christianity first entered the world, it changed the pagan into the Christian household, and from the union of Christian families, thus begotten, the Church came forth as a community. The Christian state also sprang from the Christian family. When first the young Christians of Rome and Greece received and profited by the holy Sacrament of Matrimony,—when young men and women, converted from Paganism and Judaism, entered into Christian wedlock, and became the parents of Christian children,—the kingdom of God advanced with great strides.

Those were glorious and happy times when Christian thought and principle were the foundation of all the institutions of public life, of all law and morals. The Christian family gave worthy and pious priests to the Church, and conscientious, faithful, civil officers to the state. Christian princes governed the state and the people in peaceful prosperity. Christian families furnished those noble men and women, who consecrated themselves to God in the religious state, devoting their lives and their fortunes unreservedly to the relief and comfort of suffering humanity. And though those times had their defects, mistakes, and abuses, much to be deplored, yet were the latter trifling, indeed, compared to the evils which shall overwhelm us when the spirit of modern Paganism saps (as it seems about to do) the very foundations of Christian family-life. Vices and calamities of all kinds —war, revolutions, and anarchy will inevitably follow.

Our only hope for a better future,—if it were possible for the Christian family to become extinct, the faith of Christ would infallibly disappear from the earth. The enemies of the Church recognize this fact as well as we; hence, they strive with all their power through the introduction of civil marriage and godless schools, to deprive the family of religion. When public life has become unchristian, the refuge of Christianity must be, as in the first centuries, in the bosom of the family. *Woe to the world, if it find no shelter there!*

O Christian parents, you are the salt of the earth, you are the priests of your families, you are the tapers of God, placed, as a light in the

candlestick, for the enlightenment of many ! You must preserve the seed of the Gospel and furnish it a rich and fertile soil in the garden of your homes. Every Christian family, at present, should resemble the Macchabees of old, who, in hard and perilous times, so nobly and courageously defended the faith of their fathers. Therefore, O fathers and mothers, make your homes Christian homes, in the fullest sense of the word ! First of all, be *yourselves* pious, practical Catholics, loyally devoted to the Church, and faithful in the practice of your exalted duties. Each of your houses must be a church in miniature, where, as God's representatives, you exercise the powers of your royal priesthood. In the care of your household, imitate the vigilance and care of the Church for the salvation of her children. Assemble your family for prayers, morning and evening. Celebrate in your houses, in your lives, the various seasons of the ecclesiastical year, entering into the spirit of its beautiful lessons,—its joys, and its sorrows.

“I and my house will serve the Lord,” said Josue in his farewell discourse to the people. (Josue 24: 15.) And such must be your resolution, to-day. “I and my wife, my children and my servants will serve the Lord.” Behold, Christian parents, this majestic temple of God. Outside the winds blow, the storm rages, illicit pleasures and vices run riot in the world. But here, all is peace and tranquillity. So must your households be. When the storms of infidelity distract human society, when vice roams the streets, and corruption is abroad, then must your houses be the abodes of peace and the beautiful temples of virtue. Amen.

BISHOP EHRLER.

THE EPIPHANY.

ON THE SPIRITUAL OFFERINGS WE SHOULD PRESENT OUR SAVIOUR.

Opening their treasures, they offered to him gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh." (Matt. 2: 11.)

We celebrate, to-day, that festival which the Catholic Church calls the Epiphany, or manifestation. God, our Saviour, was born in Bethlehem of Juda, but his birth was not known to the world, until a star appeared in the heavens, and announced to the Magi or Wise Men of the East that "the light of the world was born." (John 8: 12.) In this wonderful star, we find the beginning of our vocation; and in the adoration of the Wise Men, the origin of our faith. There may, perhaps, be many among you who can say with the Three Kings, "we have seen his star;" (Matt. 2: 2.) but they can not say truthfully: "We have come with our treasures to adore him." And in this sense, "many are called, but few are chosen," (Matt. 20: 16) that is, numbers receive the grace of Faith, but fail to co-operate diligently with it. Hence, beloved friends! to-day, we shall not only thank God for the grace of the true Faith, (for this is, indeed, a great grace, "as he hath not done in like manner to every nation") (Ps. 147: 20), but also imitate the example of the Three Kings and co-operate with the divine grace. They exhibit to us, on this festival, not merely a historic, but an active faith. They believed, and testified by their gifts that they believed. They offered to our Saviour:

- I. *Myrrh as to a man;*
- II. *Frankincense as to a God; and*
- III. *Gold as to a king.*

I. They offered him *myrrh as to a man*; and we may offer him instead of myrrh, *our faith in him.*

I. Christ was, at the same time, both God and man; but the humanity, not the divinity, appeared outwardly. Thus we see, the faith of the Three Kings was strong and lively. St. Bernard admires it, and says, "neither the mean abode of a stable, nor the poverty of the crib, nor the presence of the poor mother, nor the childhood of the Saviour could shake their faith. None of these things disturbed them.

2. Here is a lesson for us, who frequently do not believe in the articles of faith as strongly as we should, seeking rather to comprehend them. No! faith must always be veiled in obscurity to a certain extent, otherwise it ceases to be faith. At the same time, there is nothing uncertain about it, for the Apostle says, "I run, not as at an uncertainty." (1 Cor. 9:26.) God has revealed the truths of religion, and the holy Church is a faithful interpreter of the divine revelation. Our faith rests upon God's word, who can not deceive. He has confirmed his doctrines by abundant miracles. The Three Kings had not seen nor heard as many marvelous signs and wonders as we have, and nevertheless, they believed. Alas for us, unbelievers!

II. They offered *frankincense as to a God*; and we may offer to him instead of this, *our hope*.

1. Just as they gave testimony of their belief in Christ's humanity by their gift of myrrh, so the Magi acknowledged his divinity by the frankincense they presented; for "incense," as St. Chrysostom says, "is suitable only for a sacrifice to God." The Wise Men confessed his divinity not only by their gift of frankincense, but also, by their joint act of adoration. "We have come to adore him." Adoration is due to God alone. "They would not have worshiped him so devoutly, had they not believed and hoped in him."

2. In the same manner, as God alone is to be adored, so also must we *hope in him alone*. "For the Lord is the hope of his people." And hence, Christ rose again gloriously from the dead, "that your faith and hope might be in him." (1 Peter 1:21.) Therefore the Psalmist confesses "my hope is in God." (Ps. 61:8). "Lord, thou art my hope from my youth." (Ps. 70:5). "It is good to trust in the Lord rather than to trust in princes." (Ps. 117:9.). For according to the testimony of the Apostle "hope confoundeth not." (Rom. 5:5.) God's promise is the foundation of Christian hope. Man is often unstable and deceptive in his promises, but God is faithful and immutable. We cannot offer to God a more acceptable sacrifice than the incense of our hope by which we acknowledge and trust in him as our God and our Lord.

III. They offered him *gold as to a king*; and we shall now offer him what is more acceptable to him than gold:—*the whole love of our hearts.*

1. It is not to be wondered at that King Herod, as the Evangelist says, "was troubled," (Matt 2:3), whilst the Three Wise Men of the

East were full of joy. The former sought the new-born king of the Jews that he might kill him, but the latter came to adore him, and give him gifts. Herod feared lest our Saviour might supplant him ; but the Three Kings longed for him as their Sovereign and Redeemer. They eagerly desired to find his kingdom, whilst Herod trembled lest he might lose his own. They recognized the holy Child as their king, indeed, but as the one who says, " My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18 : 36.) They adored him as their king, and therefore they offered him gold as a sign of their subjection. Was not their faith active ? Was it not " the faith that worketh by charity ? " (Gal. 5 : 6.)

2. Beloved brethren ! What gold is among the other metals, love is among the virtues—viz., the most precious. The Three Kings offered the most valuable metal. Let us offer to our new-born Saviour the best that we have, and this according to the testimony of the Angelic Doctor is Love. Faith and hope are great virtues, but love is greater still. " Now there remain faith, hope, and charity, these three : but the greatest of these is charity." (1 Cor. 13 : 13.) The gold of love is that gold of which it is written " he covered the ark with the purest of gold inside and out." The ark is a figure of the Christian's soul, which is covered with the gold of love, inwardly, through the affections, and outwardly, through the good works he performs.

Peroration. The offerings of the Three Kings, were not merely gifts but mysteries. Let us follow their example, and offer to our new-born Saviour the myrrh of faith, the incense of hope, and the gold of charity. Let us not merely imitate them in the substance of this sacrifice, but in the manner of offering it. Their adoration was prompt, generous, and perfect. Scarcely had they seen the mysterious star in the heavens than they commenced their journey toward the birth-place of Christ. They surmounted all difficulties : they sought, they found. They prostrated themselves ; they made their offerings, and following the orders they had received, they went back another way into their own country. What the star was to them, our vocation as CHRISTIANS is to us. We are called by the grace of God ; but that we may be chosen, let us respond promptly, generously, and perfectly to the divine inspirations. Amen.

THE EPIPHANY.

THE PROPAGATION OF THE FAITH.

“Arise, be enlightened: for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” (Is. 60:1.)

The Epiphany of our Lord has been ranked by the Church from the beginning amongst the most glorious of her festivals. Clement of Alexandria mentions it in the second century, Julian the Apostate, during his stay in Gaul did not dare absent himself from public worship on this day, lest he should thereby offend the religious sentiment of the people. In the middle ages, this festival was called “the highest” or “the greatest” and was celebrated with even greater solemnity than that of the Nativity of our Lord. In the times of Charlemagne, servile work was forbidden during the entire octave of this festival. Even when this precept had gradually died out, the obligation of hearing Mass daily during the octave continued for a long time. On this day several events are commemorated. It is called the *Epiphany* or manifestation of our Lord, *the day of light*, or *the festival of the Three Kings*. The chief events which proclaim the Divinity of our Lord are united in this one feast; the adoration of the Wise Men of the East, Christ’s Baptism in the river Jordan and the first miracle which he wrought at the marriage in Cana of Galilee. Turning our eyes, at present, upon both the Christian and the pagan world, we must say with the prophet: “Darkness shall cover the earth, and a mist the people” (Is. 60:2), for although the glory of the Messiah shines brightly abroad, and the Church has set her conquering foot upon every portion of the globe, vast territories still remain to be won over to the Gospel. Many tribes and peoples have either never yet received, or received but to lose, the blessings of Christianity. The entire Turkish Empire sits in the darkness of error. Only the coasts of Africa have been converted to the Faith of Jesus Christ. Its interior, like that of Asia, is inhabited by pagans, who have never yet heard of God and his only-begotten Son. The great empire of China is peopled with nearly three hundred and sixty millions of heathens. The pagans are more numerous than the professors of Christianity. Nearly all of the northern and eastern parts of Europe are separated from the one true Church. “Darkness shall cover the earth, and a mist the people!” A great field, ripe and white for the harvest, lies before our eyes!

It is customary, on this day, to exhort and encourage the faithful to contribute, to the best of their ability, towards the Propagation of the Faith, or to the support of Christian missions, that the glory of the Son

of God may be still further extended throughout the world. Therefore, I shall speak :

- I. *On our great obligation to support these missions ; and*
- II. *On the great blessing which accrues from the fulfilment of that duty.*

I. The grand work of the Christian missions is not one which may be performed or neglected at pleasure. On the contrary, it is a sublime and holy duty which must be performed by all the faithful either in person, or by the co-operation of prayers and alms-deeds.

I. Our holy Church is that evangelical mustard-seed planted in the soil of the earth, which is destined to grow into a mighty tree, overshadowing all tribes and peoples. Christ has put into its roots a vital force, enabling it to fulfil its sublime destiny. But, like every other tree, its branches and twigs, *i. e.*, its living members, its assemblage of human souls, must be constantly in motion, if it would grow larger, stronger, and higher. The body of Jesus Christ, as St. Paul calls the Church, will not come to its full and perfect growth, if each member does not employ its dormant faculties for the preservation and perfection of the whole.

True, it was only to the Apostles that our Saviour said : “ Go ye, and teach all nations, baptizing them.” (Matt. 28: 19.) To them, he gave a special charge to continue his mission upon earth. He consecrated them Bishops, and made them his ministers and the dispensers of his mysteries. But every member of the Church must participate, according to his faculties and talents, in this work to which the Apostles and their successors were appointed. Every baptized Catholic must be a missionary of Christ, discharging that duty in some manner, in union with and in subordination to that power which our Saviour gave to the Apostles alone.

All the gifts which the Lord has given to men, must be employed for him and for the erection of his kingdom upon earth. Those who have the gift of speech should preach and teach wherever the Church calls them. He that has received the gift of science should let his light shine before men. He who has the gift of prayer should cry out in earnest supplication to heaven, that the dews of God’s grace may descend upon mankind, and that, thereby, the kingdom of God may be more firmly established here below. And to whom the Lord has given riches and temporal goods, let them divide of their abundance among the needy and the poor, or expend it for the advancement of the Church of God. Power and authority, science and knowledge, position and calling, in a word, everything that comes from the treasury of Eternal Love, should

be employed for no other purpose save for the building up of God's kingdom in this world ; "for the perfection of the Saints, for the work of the ministry, unto the edification of the body of Christ." (Ephes. 4 : 12.)

2. Gratitude to God, who, without any merit of ours, has enlightened us with the knowledge of the truth, should also incite us to labor, according to our ability, for the Propagation of the Faith. Why have so many religious blessings and privileges been showered upon *us*? Why were *we* born of Christian parents, in a Christian country and a Christian era, when so many millions of others were born pagans, Jews, heretics, or unbelievers? In his ineffable love, our Lord has given to us, without any merit of ours, that which he has denied to the majority of mankind !

But will it suffice to praise this grace of God, without desiring or endeavoring, to have others share it? If we rejoice in our safety within the *ark of God*, within the *bark of Peter*, will we not stretch forth our hands to the rescue of our shipwrecked brethren, struggling in the stormy ocean of doubt and temptation? Will not the Lord expect such a return from us, for all the graces he has given? The more we are convinced of the value and blessing of our holy faith, and filled with gratitude to God, so much the greater will be our desire to assist all unbelievers to a knowledge of the truth.

3. Fraternal charity is the third motive which should urge us to the performance of this duty. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," says Christ ; and the love of one's neighbor can not manifest itself better or more beautifully than in support of the Propagation of Faith. We are not merely helping our fellow-creatures in a passing and transient necessity, but in the greatest and most important of all needs. We are striving to give to them the priceless jewel of faith. He who aids a soul to enter the holy Catholic Church, gives to her the pearl of great price,—Jesus Christ himself.

II. Great are the blessings which rest upon every good work, even the smallest, for the Propagation of our holy Faith ; blessings which are twofold, descending alike upon the giver and the receiver.

1. As to *the receiver*. Living in the pleasant pastures of the Church, and enjoying from our youth, the blessings of religious instruction, it is difficult for us to understand the misfortune in which our pagan ancestors once languished, and under which so many peoples and nations at present groan. What does it mean to live and die a pagan? O, unspeakable calamity ! Who can adequately depict the abyss of

spiritual and temporal misery which underlies that one word—Paganism !

Some modern philosophers have tried to represent the condition of heathen nations in a cheerful light. They call paganism the childhood of the human race, the lowest step in its development ; they descant upon the innocent, peaceful life led by people in the state of nature ; thence, they imagine that the latter should not be disturbed or torn away from their condition of childlike natural simplicity ; they tell us, with all earnestness, that the restraints of civilization should not be forced upon those untutored souls ; neither should we trouble ourselves about converting them to Christianity.

But this is all foolish, and worse than foolish, talk. Paganism is the degradation of the human race to the lowest depth of misery and corruption. It is not the childhood of humanity, but it is the brute deified, and man brutified ; it is infamy and vice. Not among flowery and blooming meadows do these pagans despote themselves, like innocent children ; they walk in dark and gloomy paths, through a wilderness made desolate by the fiercest and most brutal passions. They are not the charming children of nature, but the accursed captives of Satan.

If you ask a heathen :—“ Who created you ? ” he will reply : “ I do not know.” If you ask him, “ For what end are you in this world ? ” he will make answer again : “ I do not know.” And if you ask, “ Where will you go to when you die ? ”—still again he will respond : “ I do not know.” As to religion, he knows naught save a vile garbage of fables, superstitions, and foul legends. And you will weep over him, from the depths of your soul, when you see him, prostrate in prayer, trembling and quaking before an idol made of wood or stone, or before a natural element or a soulless animal.

Is it right to leave these people in this deplorable, bestial condition ? Made to God’s sublime image and likeness, should they be allowed to spend their time solely in gratifying their low, sensual desires,—passing their days in alternate slothfulness or passionate, bloody warfare ? Should not all Christian people make every effort to deliver pagans from this terrible condition ? Should not the Christianizing of the natives be the first concern of those governments which have conquered or subdued them ? Alas ! what is the fate of the heathen at the hour of death ? He goes into eternity only to find the gate of heaven closed against him. After a life-time devoid of the light of divine faith and grace, he sinks down into the abyss of eternal night and never-ending darkness.

Ah ! my brethren, if through your alms and prayers you help to save these pagans and raise them up to the true dignity of man, you remove from them the bondage of ignorance, and give to them the

knowledge of the true God. You reveal to them the end and object of their existence, and give them strength necessary to attain it. You erect churches and schools, and instruct them in the peaceful arts of life. You help to free them from their sins; and turn the key which opens to them the gate of heaven. Is there a grander or more blessed work than to elevate men degraded almost to the level of wild beasts, and change them into Saints and confessors of Christ? Who is there that would not contribute according to his means to aid this glorious work?

2. With richest rewards will God requite the man who supports the Church in her missionary labors. "Whosoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones, a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, Amen, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward." (Matt. 10: 42.) How graciously, then, will not our Lord repay the living draught of faith given in his name to every pagan soul! "He that shall drink of the water that I shall give him," said he to the Samaritan woman, "shall not thirst forever; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4: 13, 14.) By our contributions to the relief of Christian missions, we place ourselves side by side with Jesus Christ, who came down from heaven to earth, in order to redeem the world. We partake of his work and assist him in erecting the structure of his holy Church. We shall, therefore, share in his reward in the kingdom of his Father. The glory and splendor of the Church, revealed in those everlasting mansions, shall shine forth in all those, her members, who labored with her on earth to disseminate and establish the faith of Christ.

Supporting the foreign missions, by your generous offerings, my brethren, you participate in the merits of those apostolic missionaries who actually carry the light of the Gospel abroad, over land and sea. Behold the efforts made by our separated brethren, and be nobly and generously incited to do your duty! The Protestant Bible Societies spend millions every year in the distribution of Bibles and tracts, and they never tire repeating this profitless work. Shall we allow our dissenting brethren to put us to the blush? Shall we do less for the cause of Truth than they do for that of error? Ah! no; let us enkindle the slumbering fires of holy zeal, and let us by word, and desire, and deed, cry out in fervent supplication to the nations that sit in darkness and the shadow of death: "Arise, be enlightened, O Jerusalem: for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." Amen.

BISHOP EHRLER.

THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

PENANCE.

“Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.” (Luke 2 : 48).

After Joseph and Mary “had fulfilled the days, when they returned, the child Jesus remained in Jerusalem ; and his parents knew it not.” (Luke 2 : 43.) Ordinary mothers are tenderly careful of their children. How much more then was Mary troubled at the loss of her divine Son ! She could not be consoled ; partly, because she dreaded the machination of the Jews against her divine Child ; and partly because she feared lest she or St. Joseph had inadvertently displeased the dear Jesus, and caused him to withdraw from their society. Her sorrow was as great as her loss. She searched for her divine Son on all sides, and when, at last, she found him in the Temple, her heartfelt grief found vent in the following words : “Son, why hast thou done so to us ? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.” (Luke 2 : 48.) An expression which should encourage those who have lost their God, by grievous sin, to seek him again.

I. *Through penance ; and*

II. *With sorrow.*

I. To sin mortally means to lose God, or his grace, of our own free will. This loss is great and full of danger. Great, indeed, because it is the loss of a God ; full of danger, because the sinner is, at every hour and moment, on the point of everlasting ruin. How necessary it is then that he should

1. Seek his God, and

2. That he should seek him speedily.

1. “He who has lost God, has lost everything,” says St. Bernard. Open your eyes, then, O, sinner ! and consider what you have lost. If you do so, you cannot help but be moved ; you can never more be at peace until you have again found your God. The memory of your evil deeds must always continue to haunt you. With the Psalmist you must confess : “My sin is always before me.” (Ps. 50 : 5.) But it is a good sign when a man feels the pain and the injury of sin.

2. When a man has lost God, his fault is great ; but it is still

greater if he fails to seek him speedily. If one loses temporal goods, what will he not do to recover them? He calls his friends together, he goes to law; in short, he stops at nothing to regain his lost treasure. It is only when he has lost God and his heavenly inheritance, that man is dilatory and indifferent.

II. He who wishes to find God through penance, must not only seek him, but *seek him with sorrow*. Sorrow of soul is manifested by the grief which we experience for some past event, says St. Augustine. Now, we are truly insensible if we feel no grief at the contemplation of our unworthy conduct towards

1. Our Creator; and
2. Our Benefactor.

1. The sinner, by his sin, turns away from his Creator, and fixes his affections on the creature. Is this not the greatest blindness that can be imagined! For what end and aim did God create us? He himself is our ultimate end; and yet we turn away from him, and seek our aim in a creature which can never satisfy us, because it is of its very nature, transitory and changeable. Should such conduct awaken in us no sorrow or repentance?

2. "If your heart is not yet touched with sorrow for the insult offered to your Creator, at least, let the ingratitude which you have shown to your *Benefactor* move you to contrition," says St. Bernard. Where shall we find such a Benefactor as God? He created us, he preserves us, he loves us; "he spared not even his own Son, but delivered him up for us all,"—his only-begotten Son for us miserable men, the Lord for the servants, the Just One for the ungodly! "What is there that I ought to do more to my vineyard that I have not done to it?" (Isai. 5 : 4.)

"Seek ye the Lord, while he may be found: call upon him, while he is near." (Isai. 55 : 6.) The Wise Man gives us an impressive lesson: "Delay not to be converted to the Lord." (Eccles. 5 : 8.) And the Evangelist assures us: "Every one that asketh, receiveth: and he that seeketh, findeth: and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." (Matth. 7 : 8.) Perhaps a time may come when you may call out with the foolish virgins: "Lord, Lord, open to us!" Oh, woe to us, if we hear that fearful answer: "Amen,—I know you not." (Matth. 25 : 11, 12.) Reflect well how impressively God warns you when he says: "You shall seek me, and shall not find me." (John 7 : 36.) What a terrible meaning lies hidden in these words! *To seek God and not to find him.* Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

LUKEWARMNESS.

“Did you not know that I must be about the things that are my Father’s?” (Luke 2:49).

A boy of twelve years, full of heavenly wisdom and knowledge, in the midst of the doctors of the Temple, asking and answering questions and astonishing all who listen to him—what a strange and wonderful phenomenon! Remaining behind in the Temple, he knows that his father and mother are seeking him sorrowing, yet he sits amid those grave, learned men, utterly absorbed in the questions of the Law; and all are astonished at the wisdom of his answers. What are meat and drink, home and friends to *him*, compared with the honor and glory of the One who has sent him? At last, when his parents discover him, and his sorely-troubled mother pleads with him: “Son, why hast thou done so to us?” he calmly replies: “How is it that you sought me? did you not know that I must be about the things that are my Father’s?”

Where upon earth is there a child like unto this divine Child? Yea, rather where is there an adult Christian who tarries in church with the same pleasure and zeal as the Child Jesus lingered in the Temple? Oh, how much does he abash us all, young and old! For days together he remains in the house of God, and *we* complain, if the divine service lasts for an hour? In our impatience, we pull out our watches several times during the sermon, and show them to our neighbors, giving all to understand, that we are tired of listening to the word of God. The Child Jesus gives his undivided attention to the things which concern his Father’s glory; and we can scarcely keep our attention fixed for a few moments upon divine things. Whence this tepidity and sloth in the service of God,—this drowsiness and distraction at Mass, meditation, and prayer? Manifestly, from a paralysis of religious feeling, in short, from our *lukewarmness*. This tepidity in the service of God is a terrible malady of the soul; and I will now show you

- I. The *marks* by which it may be known;
- II. Its *sad consequences*; and
- III. The most efficacious *remedies* for its cure.

- I. As every disease of the body has certain symptoms whereby it

can be distinguished from others, so lukewarmness, a disease of the soul, has its proper marks and characteristics.

1. A lukewarm person *has a certain horror of gross crimes or grievous sins* ; but he makes little account of small faults and imperfections ;—he easily omits the good he is bound to do ; and does not scruple the neglect of certain duties and obligations of his state of life.

2. The lukewarm Christian *performs many good works*—he says his prayers regularly, and assists at the different exercises of devotion ; but *without attention, without fervor* ; his heart belies the utterance of his lips. He *goes to church, and hears Mass* on Sundays and Holydays, but only because *it is customary to do so*. You can see in his countenance, in his posture, in his whole deportment, that he is there only in body, and that his mind is far away ; the time hangs heavily on his hands, he yawns, rubs his eyes, and thinks—God knows what ! *He wills and he wills not* ; he would gladly reign with God in heaven, but he will do nothing, suffer nothing, sacrifice nothing for salvation. The reward promised by God delights him, but as soon as there is question about doing violence to himself in order to possess it, he shrinks back—*He goes to confession, but without an amendment of life* ; he *receives holy Communion but without any benefit to himself* ; he thinks, reflects, and works all day—but *without any reference to God*, and therefore, *without any merit for eternity*. He *gives alms to the poor, but only from natural compassion, or when compelled, as it were, by the importunity of the suppliant*.

3. In all his practices of virtue, no true Christianity is discernible. He nourishes hatred and envy in his heart, and finds pleasure and delight in the company of lukewarm and indifferent Christians—he hears the Word of God, but without fruit—he beholds many beautiful examples of virtue and holiness, but he does not imitate them—he receives many good lessons and admonitions—and forgets them. God offers him abundant graces, but he neglects to avail himself of them ; he declines to co-operate with them. He finds no relish in pious discourses ; he hardly ever reads a spiritual book ; in a word, lukewarmness is to the soul what blindness is to the body,—a disease most fatal in its effects, and most difficult to be cured.

II. *The sad consequences of lukewarmness, will become clear to us.*

1. *When we consider God's horror for a lukewarm soul.* “I know thy works ; that thou art neither cold nor hot ; I would thou wert

cold, or hot ; but because thou art lukewarm and neither cold, nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth." (Apoc. 3 : 15, 16.) The lukewarm Christian is an abomination in the sight of the Most High ; he is ready to reject him forever. Yes, that merciful, long-suffering Lord who goes to meet the greatest sinner, and tenderly embraces the Prodigal Son, even *he* can no longer bear with the lukewarm. He surfeits, as it were, the bowels of God's mercy, and fills the divine heart of Jesus with a disgust and nausea similar to that which a draught of lukewarm water produces on the natural stomach. O tepid Christians, consider this terrible position which you occupy before God. You are not with him, but against him ; you do not gather with him, but scatter. "He that is not with me is against me ; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth." (Luke 11 : 23.) Unless you change your life,—unless you begin to serve God with fervor and fidelity,—his terrible threat will be fulfilled, he will cast you from him in horror and disgust. But the lukewarm hear the judgments of God and tremble not ; they hear these terrible truths—and persevere in their insensibility and indifference. Whatever they do for God, is done only by halves. Truly, a great sinner is more susceptible of a strong impression, more capable of a magnanimous resolution, and hence, more worthy of eternal salvation, than a soul that is plunged in the deadly torpor of lukewarmness and indifference. It is this that the Holy Ghost wishes to express, when he says : "I would thou wert cold, or hot." (Apoc. 3 : 15.)

2. *No malady of the soul is more obstinate or harder to be healed*, than lukewarmness ; and this, for two reasons : First, because to the lukewarm Christian all means of salvation are changed into poison ; and secondly, because lukewarmness causes blindness.

a. *All means of salvation are turned into poison for the lukewarm Christian.* Meditation, prayer, confessions, Communions, Masses, sermons,—all these powerful means heal and sanctify others—but they only confirm the lukewarm more deeply in their lamentable condition.

b. Furthermore, the lukewarm person is spiritually blind, a lukewarm soul does not realize its own mortal sickness ; it lives carelessly and indifferently, imagining that all is right, when in reality all is wrong. A consumptive, although reduced and exhausted by his disease, and every day approaching nearer to the grave, far from noticing the ravages of his malady, rises when others rise, goes with them to his meals, occupies his place in society, shows himself in the streets, and seems to belong to the number of the living when he is already standing with one foot in the grave. He sleeps, he eats, and drinks, he converses with his friends as usual—but suddenly, without expecting it—death snatches him away. *This is the picture of the lukewarm Christian.* He says his prayers, goes to

confession and Communion, takes part in the exercises of devotion ; but, at the same time, he is guilty of various infidelities, which he makes light of, though they may often include mortal sins. He is blinded by the obscurity and mist in which his conscience is enveloped. In this manner, he loses, by little and little, the fear of God ; he becomes familiar with sin ; and finally, allows himself to fall into a fatal sleep from which he shall not awaken, until he has fallen over the precipice into the everlasting abyss. Oh, it is only too true what St. Bernardine of Sienna says: "I have seen usurers, cruel soldiers, harlots, and heathens doing penance and being converted to the Lord, but I tremble for lukewarm Christians, because I have never witnessed the conversion of one of them." And if we consult history we find this truth corroborated by facts. We read that *David*, an adulterer and murderer, was converted ; that *Mary Magdalen*, a public sinner, shed copious penitential tears over her sins ; that *Zaccheus*, a man guilty of much injustice, made most ample restitution ; that *St. Peter* blotted out his denial of the Lord by his ever-flowing tears and life-long repentance ; and that even *the thief on the cross* was converted in his last hour. These were great sinners, but their sins were not so great that God's mercy could not pardon them. But where do we read that any *one of the Scribes and Pharisees*—those lukewarm, self-righteous souls, was converted to the Lord, and did penance ? It is certain that a great sinner is more easily converted than a lukewarm Christian. But you will ask : Is this malady, then, absolutely incurable ? No, with God, nothing is impossible. God is the physician, he is almighty, and with an omnipotent physician, no sickness is incurable ; but we must do our part.

III. We must diligently avail ourselves of the infallible remedies against lukewarmness.

1. The *first remedy* is *the frequent consideration of its sad consequences*. He who seriously reflects whither tepidity leads, can not long remain lukewarm in the service of God and the business of his salvation. He who knows and feels that God abhors him, can not be pleased and satisfied with himself.

1. The *thought of our eternal destiny*. We are upon earth to serve God, and thereby, to be saved. "*In spirit fervent serving the Lord*," says St. Paul (Rom. 12: 11). It is not possible for him to be lukewarm who serves so great and mighty a Lord, as is the Most High and Omnipotent God. St. Ignatius one day, seeing a lay brother careless in his work, asked him, for whom he was working. The brother

answered : " For God " ; and the saint replied : " If you had told me : for men, I would excuse you ; but there is no excuse for him who works for God, and does his work as negligently and lukewarmly as you are doing this ! "

3. *The remembrance of the sweet consolation which a soul experiences in life and in the hour of death, from the consciousness of having served God faithfully and fervently.* Go to the death-bed of a pious servant of God. There, you will witness the reward of the violence which the dying man made use of in life in order to gain heaven ; you can read in every feature of his countenance the fulfilment of the promise : " Precious in the sight of the Lord, is the death of his saints." (Ps. 115 : 15.)

4. *A salutary fright.* The lukewarm need some powerful shock to rouse them from their tepidity. The thought of God and of his love, has no effect,—they must be shaken out of their sleep, they must be scared and frightened into doing their duty. If an alarm of fire is heard at midnight in a hospital, who shall describe the terror, the wild anguish of the inmates ? The fear of being roasted alive makes the weak, strong. Even confirmed cripples have been known to rise up, on such occasions, and drag themselves hurriedly out of danger. A similar cry of alarm, is needed to arouse the lukewarm from their tepidity. Yes, far more terrible shall be the alarm that shall one day sound in their ears, when they shall hear first the voice of the mighty angel crying : " *Arise ye dead, and come to judgment,*" and afterwards the awful voice of the angry judge, proclaiming : " Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire ! "

Who does not know the parable of the unprofitable servant ? He had neither stolen, nor robbed, nor committed murder, yet from sheer laziness and tepidity, he had buried his talent—and his doom was to be cast out into exterior darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Is not this example calculated to bring every slothful Christian to his senses and make him serve God with all his heart and strength ? Philip II., king of Spain, whilst hearing Mass, one day, noticed two courtiers holding an idle conversation during the whole time of the holy sacrifice. Quitting the chapel, the king said to them : " Is it thus you hear Mass ? Never again show yourselves before my face." This rebuke was like a thunderbolt to both offenders. One of them died two days afterwards, and the other lost his reason and became a maniac. My dear brethren, how will it be when the tepid Christian shall hear these words from the mouth of the eternal king : " *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.*" Truly, he who seri-

ously reflects on this everlasting rejection, can not remain lukewarm or indifferent in the performance of his religious duties. A salutary fear and consternation must enliven his fervor and increase his vigilance.

But what is the panacea or universal remedy for lukewarmness? PRAYER, fervent, devout, and persevering prayer. Prayer it is that draws the divine grace from heaven to earth ; that moistens dry, arid hearts with the dew of heaven ; and penetrates cold, careless souls with a holy fire and warmth. As St. Augustine says : " Prayer ascends to heaven, and grace descends in its stead."

My dearly beloved, search diligently your souls for the symptoms of this dangerous malady ; and if you find yourselves infected with it, make prompt and faithful use of the prescribed remedies. Shrink not from any labor, pain, or sacrifice, no matter how hard or bitter, for heaven is worth it all. Advance in wisdom and grace as you advance in years. " To-day, if you shall hear his voice, (the voice of God), harden not your hearts ; " (Ps. 94: 8) and be ever fearful lest the prediction of St. Paul be verified in you : " According to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the just judgment of God." (Rom. 2: 5.) Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THE SPIRITUAL ESPOUSAL OF THE SOUL TO GOD.

“And Jesus also was invited, and his disciples, to the marriage.”
(John 2: 2.)

Many worldly marriages are accompanied with great pomp and show; but Jesus is not often invited to them. Frequently, indeed, he is obliged to absent himself from them, because such espousals have not been begun or accomplished in the spirit of God. But I wish to present to you to-day a spiritual wedding-feast to which Jesus is invited; to which he comes, not as a guest, but as a bridegroom. It is not to be wondered at, says St. Augustine, that Jesus has appeared at the marriage-feast, since he came into the world to espouse himself to the human soul. My Christian hearers, do you now know the bride and the bridegroom? Let me show you

- I. *The manner* ; and
- II. *The joy, of these spiritual espousals.*

I do not doubt that if you give me your attention, and examine closely into these two propositions, you will all endeavor to espouse your souls to Jesus.

I. A soul that wishes to be espoused to God must hate itself and love God only; or, which is the same thing, it must

1. Leave itself ; and
2. Cleave to God.

1. From one point of view, the spiritual and corporal espousals are alike. “ For this cause,” says the Apostle, “ shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife.” (Ephes. 5: 31.) He who wishes his soul to become the spouse of Jesus, must be able to say with St. Peter, “ Behold, we have left all things, and have followed thee.” (Matth. 19 : 27.) We have left all things, at least in spirit, in desire, we have left ourselves ; we have overcome our self-love.

2. We must hate ourselves, and love God alone. The love between husband and wife must be a faithful, a pure love. It must be founded

altogether upon the beloved one. If grounded solely upon riches, beauty, or any other temporal advantage, it will not be a true or faithful affection. It will be easily extinguished by misfortunes, or afflictions. If such love is necessary in temporal espousals, how much more and greater should be our love to God, our eternal Spouse ! We must love him, says St. Augustine, with a true love of preference.

II. The more amiable the person of the beloved, the greater the affection and delight of the lover. Now, measure, if you can, the happiness and satisfaction of a soul that

1. Loves God ; and
2. Enjoys him.

1. Who is more worthy of love than God, who is love itself ? Who is richer, who is more powerful, and, (since love generally is called forth by beauty,) who is more beautiful than he whose splendor surpasses that of the sun ? God can give us no greater happiness or joy in heaven, than that of loving him perfectly. O, how happy is that soul which already enjoys, here upon earth, a portion of that beatitude ! It will sweeten all its trials and tribulations. " How great is the multitude of thy sweetness, O Lord ! " (Ps. 30: 10) which is only felt by those who love thee. " It is good for me to adhere to my God." (Ps. 72: 28.)

2. But when we consider that, in the spiritual espousals, we may not only love God, but we may also enjoy him, how vile and contemptible become all temporal joys and pleasures ! What do we mean by enjoying God ? " It is better to ask him who has experienced it," says St. Bernard, " for, even if I had experienced this happiness, I should not be able to express it in words. The soul that enjoys God is no longer sensible of itself ; through the inexpressible sweetness of God it is entranced, and is out of itself with happiness." O, the ravishing sweetness of God !

Dost thou wish, oh, my soul, to be espoused to Jesus ? Thou lookest forward, with ardent longing, to this wedding-day; but hast thou the wedding-garment ready ? Wilt thou invite him to the feast who is, " beautiful above the sons of men " ? If so, thou must be ready to stand on his " right hand in gilded clothing, clothed round about with varieties." (Ps. 44: 3, 10-15). The joy of this union charms thee : and thou knowest now, the manner of accomplishing it. Then: " Hearken, oh daughter, and incline thy ear ; and forget thy people, and thy father's house. And the king shall greatly desire thy beauty ; " (Ps. 44: 11) then will he truly say to thee : " Thou art beautiful, O, my love ! " (Cant. 6: 3.) Thou art worthy to be called my spouse. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THE POWER AND CONSOLING INFLUENCE OF THE HOLY NAME OF JESUS.

“His name was called Jesus.” (Luke 2: 21.)

To-day, we celebrate the festival of the holy Name of Jesus. The feast of the Circumcision is that which commemorates the conferring of that holy name upon the Redeemer of the world ; but since it falls upon the same day as the world's festival of New Year it excites but little interest ; and if Catholics were not bound, at least, to hear Mass thereon it would most likely pass wholly unnoticed,—hence the Church keeps, to-day, a special feast in honor of the adorable Name of Jesus, that name which above all other names, at whose very sound every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, or in hell. How shall I speak of this holy name as I ought—how dilate upon the beauties of that name which even the immaculate Mary was not allowed to give her Child, but which was given by God himself. “ His name was called Jesus, which was called by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.” (Luke 2: 21). No, I can not hope to speak of it as it deserves. It is the fountain-source of all that is great, and good, and holy, and sublime. Nevertheless I will offer you my thoughts about it, (such as they are), and will present to your consideration this morning,

- I. *The Power ; and*
- II. *The Consoling influence of the holy Name of Jesus.*

I. *The power of the holy Name of Jesus.*

1. Our Lord left his name as a precious legacy to his Apostles : “ If you shall ask me anything in my name, that I will do.” (John 14: 14) This promise he made them before his death ; and, after his resurrection, extending the same to all the faithful, he said : “ These things shall follow those that believe. In my name they shall cast out devils : they shall speak with new tongues : they shall lay their hands upon the sick, and they shall recover.” (Mark 16: 17, 18.)

2. St. Peter well knew the worth of these divine promises ; and his first miracle was a signal proof of his faith, a triumph of the power of the holy Name of Jesus. On one occasion, as he was entering the temple with St. John, a poor man asked an alms of them. St. Peter said :

“Silver and gold I have none ; but what I have, I give thee : in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” The people were filled with wonder and amazement to behold a man of forty years of age, who had never before walked, hastening into the temple, leaping and dancing and praising God. But St. Peter said to them : “Ye men of Israel, why wonder you at this ? or why look you upon us, as if by our own strength or power we had made this man to walk ? . . . The God of our fathers hath glorified his son Jesus . . . and his name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong, whom you have seen and known ; and the faith which is by him hath given this perfect soundness in the sight of you all.” (Acts 3: 1-17.)—For this act of charity, St. Peter and St. John were imprisoned until the next day. On being brought to trial, St. Peter said : “If we this day are examined concerning the good deed done to the infirm man, by what means he hath been made whole ; be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you have crucified, whom God hath raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, which is become the head of the corner. Nor is there salvation in any other. For there is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4: 9-13.)—The priests and officers having consulted together, the Apostles were told that henceforth they should neither speak nor teach in the name of Jesus. You see even unbelievers were forced to acknowledge its power. The Apostles answered : “If it be just in the sight of God, to hear you, rather than God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” (Ibid., 19, 20).

3. Again : our Blessed Lord told Ananias that he had chosen St. Paul as a special vessel of election for the very work of carrying *his name* before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. His holy Church has never ceased to employ this powerful weapon whereby she has conquered the nations of the earth. Hear the great St. Bernard : “Whence do you think so sudden a light of faith has sprung up in the world except by the preaching of the name of Jesus ?” And so much did he love this name himself that he says : “I take no pleasure in anything that may be written, except I read there the name of Jesus. No words you may address to me will excite my interest, unless I hear among them the name of Jesus. Jesus is honey in my mouth, music in my ear, and joy to my heart.”

II. *Yes, the holy name of Jesus brings great joy and consolation to the soul.*

1. How many touching associations will be suddenly recalled to the mind by the sound of some once-familiar, but now, long-forgotten, air ! How the sight of one's national flag in a foreign land, will open up a vision of well-loved scenes and faces ! In like manner, *how many sublime associations and tender memories cluster around the holy name of Jesus !* It reminds us of our departure as prodigal sons from our Father and our Father's house, of the bondage in which we have languished under a cruel enemy. The gates of heaven were forever closed against us. There was no remedy for our manifold miseries and afflictions. But there came One who for love of us made himself our Brother, while he was yet our God. He sacrificed himself to effect our rescue. His sufferings were extreme—but he gained the victory. He overcame our cruel master. He threw the gates of heaven once more wide open. He raised us up, soiled as we were, and bathed our souls in the cleansing waters of Baptism. This good Samaritan bound up our wounds, and anointed them with holy oil. He provided for our souls a heavenly food, and with this Bread of Angels restored to us our strength. Then, leading the way himself, he conducted us back to our Father and our home. Well, then, may we exclaim with the Psalmist : “ O Lord, our Lord, how admirable is thy name in the whole earth ! ” (Ps. 8 : 1.)

2. Again, *how dear to us are the names of those we love !* Their signature to a letter, or their name on the fly-leaf of a book, carries with it a sort of charm. Should they be mentioned in the newspapers in connection with some gallant deed, some wise or charitable measure, some work of art or literary production, how quickly it brings the flush of joy to the cheek ! Around the name of *mother*, too, there rests a halo, which is almost divine. It is the first word our infant lips are taught to frame ; and our devotion to it strengthens with our years from infancy to manhood. It embodies all our fond conceptions of her who was at once the source and sustenance of our infant life, the bosom friend and companion of long years of helplessness, the consolation of petty griefs, and the adviser of our mature years.

3. But *what is the name of mother in comparison with the name of Jesus ?* What has our mother been to us, compared with what Jesus has been ? Almost nothing at all. No ; the name of Jesus is enthroned in the inmost sanctuary of our hearts. How, then, can words express the love and veneration we owe it ? St. Theresa used to begin all her letters with the holy name, no matter on what or to whom they were written. St. Edmund used to trace the name of Jesus on his forehead the last thing before closing his eyes in sleep. These Saints felt that while the name of Jesus was the protection and sanctification both of

themselves and their actions, it was also the most perfect expression of their overflowing joy and love.

4. Shall I urge you, in imitation of St. Bernardine of Sienna, to set up banners in all your houses emblazoned with the name of Jesus? Or shall I incite you, (bringing it nearer home), to cut, to burn it upon your breasts? No, you must take this holy Name still closer to your hearts. You must not be content with a mere exterior reverence.

Every fresh effort you make to overcome a fault, or perfect a habit of virtue, will do more honor to the holy name of Jesus, than if you studded it with jewels upon your walls, or engraved it on your bodies in letters of blood. Perhaps the world is courting you just now with its hollow promises and its false pleasures, and your heart is divided between it and your duty to God. If so, call upon the holy Name, and there will open to your mind's eye the vision of One who loved you so much as to give his life for you. In sudden storms of passion, whether of anger, or jealousy, or unholy desire, when you feel your heart rise and swell like the waves of the sea under the power of the wind, call then upon the holy Name, and a heavenly calm will settle upon your soul. If there is one thing that honors the name of Jesus more than another, *it is patience under suffering*. When the hand of pain presses heavily upon you, O, how richly you honor the holy Name by praying for resignation in *his* strength, who won his best right to that name during the bitter sufferings of his Passion!

Remember the beautiful example set us by the very first follower of our Lord in the path of martyrdom, St. Stephen. As he was preparing to die, he knew well where to seek his much-needed strength; and lifting up his eyes to heaven, he saw the beautiful face of Jesus smiling down upon him. The sharp stones began to tear their rough way through his bleeding body, and as he looked once more upon that consoling celestial vision, he cried out: "*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!*" Who would not wish to have this name upon his lips when it comes *his* turn to die? There is none, I am sure, before me who does not. Well, then, remember that *the only hope we can reasonably have of securing so great a blessing at the hour of death is in venerating and often calling upon his holy name, WHILE WE ARE ALIVE AND WELL.* Amen.

(Adapted from the Paulist Sermons.)

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

TRUE CONFIDENCE IN GOD IN PRAYER.

“Amen, I say to you, I have not found so great faith in Israel.”
 (Matthew 8: 10.)

Our Saviour, to-day, descends from the mountain ; and after he has healed by his teachings, some of the spiritual diseases of the multitude, he wishes to relieve, by miracles, those who are suffering from corporal infirmities. A leper comes to him imploring the cure of his loathsome malady ; a centurion also approaches, begging health for his servant. Both of these petitions are at once granted. We often beg God for a certain grace, but, apparently, we are not heard. God is always ready to communicate his graces to us. He descended, to-day, from the mountain, in order to heal the sick who had not the strength to climb up to him. The fault then is not in God, but in ourselves. Our faith is

- I. *Not as great* ; and
- II. *Not as humble*, as that of the leper and the centurion.

Let us consider these two points.

Our faith must be founded :

1. *Upon the power*; and
2. *Upon the will of God*.

1. God *can* help us. We do not, indeed, doubt his power ; we know that “no word shall be impossible with God ;” (Luke 1: 37) but our faith is deficient in hope and lively confidence. Great faith is nothing else but a great confidence in obtaining that which is hoped for, but which is as yet unseen. The leper manifested this hope in the words of his prayer : “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” (Matth. 8: 2.) The centurion said : “Lord, only say the word, and my servant shall be healed.” Thou canst heal him without giving thyself the trouble of coming into my house.—Are not these two remarkable examples of a great and lively confidence ?

2. God *will* help us. The leper had hardly finished his petition before our Saviour answered him “I will.” Stretching forth his hand, says St. Ambrose, he showed the most earnest good will in the action. His power rests upon his will ; “he hath done all things whatsoever he would.” (Ps. 113: 3.) Therefore the leper makes his petition with great prudence and energy : “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.” He thus makes a perfect confession of his faith. He recognizes the power of God in the will of God ; and thus he proves himself most worthy to be heard. The experience of the centurion

was the same as that of the leper. As soon as our Saviour manifested his willingness to grant his petition, in the self-same hour his servant was healed. Scarcely had he commanded it to be done, than it *was* done. There was no interval between the command and its fulfilment. "He spoke and they were made : he commanded and they were created." (Ps. 32 : 9.)

II. A house can as little stand without a foundation, as confidence can exist without *humility*. But there are two kinds of humility :

1. *The humility of the understanding* ; and
2. *The humility of the will*.

The first consists in the knowledge of our own unworthiness ; and the second, in our confession of it.

1. The knowledge of our nothingness is the foundation of our confidence. He who cannot help himself must place his confidence in him who is able to help him. St. Bernard says : "He has the most genuine faith who neither trusts, nor hopes in himself." And this kind of faith produces humility of heart. The centurion knew full well that he could not help his servant of his own power ; therefore he appealed to our Saviour, not so much by his words, as by the confidence he manifested in him.

2. There are numbers who are well aware of their own nothingness, but are ashamed to openly acknowledge it. These should imitate the example of the leper and the centurion. A multitude of people surrounded our Saviour, but this fact did not deter them both from presenting their petitions openly. The more a false shame seemed to deter them from their design the more their humility urged them forward. The leper pointed to his loathsome sores, falling upon his face, and imploring help. Are not these actions tokens, not only of shame, but of humility ? Of the humble it is written : "God giveth grace to the humble." (James 4 : 6.) This is the humility which we must practise in our prayers, if we hope for any favor from God.

I doubt not, dearly beloved, that you have understood the principles of this truth. But let us come to practice. Have we hitherto exercised in our prayers this strong and humble confidence in God ? If not, is it any wonder that we have not been heard ? This is a blindness of which St. Ambrose complained, but which the dealings of God with man perfectly simplifies, when, in consideration of our misconduct, his arm is shortened and not stretched forth to our aid. Moreover, can we justly expect him to grant our requests when they are to the prejudice of his honor ? Would he not squander his gifts, if he shared them equally without distinction between the believer and the unbeliever, the proud, and the humble of heart ? Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THE MIRACLES OF THE CLEANSING OF THE LEPER AND THE HEALING OF THE CENTURION'S SERVANT.

"Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." (Matt. 8: 2.)

Most of the vast throng which followed Jesus, attracted by his heavenly doctrine, consisted of people of the lower walks of life. As a rule, not many, if any, of the so-called respectable, rich, and learned men of the day followed him. "The poor have the Gospel preached to them" (Matt. 11:5), said Christ to the disciples of the Baptist. Simple-minded souls take pleasure in the word of God, who "resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." (James 4:6.) "Hath any one of the rulers believed in him, or of the Pharisees?" But this multitude, that knoweth not the law, are accursed." (John 7:48.) Such was the language of the learned men in Israel. Jesus, in his infinite bounty, strengthens the faith of the devoted multitude by working two miracles on his way to the city of Capharnaum. We will make these two miracles the subject of our meditation to-day, and consider

- I. *The cleansing of the leper* ; and
- II. *The healing of the Centurion's servant*.

I. The cleansing of the leper.

I. "Behold, a leper came and adored him, saying : *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*" Leprosy, so often mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures, was a very loathsome disease of the skin, surpassing in virulence all the diseases of modern times. Like the cancer, it ate away the flesh and bone ; it covered its victim with whitish scales, and was, generally, incurable. At the close of the eighth and last Crusade, about the middle of the thirteenth century, a malignant disease, known as the plague, or pestilence, and somewhat similar to leprosy, broke out in the Christian camp in the East, and raged with such violence that nearly the half of the army was carried off in a few days. Their leader, the soul and spirit of the Crusaders, fell a victim to this horrible malady—a man who combined in himself, in an eminent degree, all the qualities of a great king, a great hero, and a great saint—Louis IX., king of France. The surviving warriors and pilgrims having brought this disease into Europe, the authorities of towns and

cities had houses erected outside of the city limits, called *Lepers' houses*; and into these abodes the unfortunate men and women infected with the plague were obliged to retire, and renounce all further communication with the outside world.

The man mentioned in the Gospel of this day was (as St. Luke describes him) "full of leprosy," covered all over with it, his face, his hands, his feet, his entire body; in short, his disease had spread to such an extent that his death was inevitable. A miserable object of compassion! But more unfortunate are those who are infected with the spiritual leprosy — namely: *Sin*, that terrible malady of the soul which disfigures in it the divine image, renders it an abomination in the eyes of God, and often infects the innocent souls of others.

2. *The leper came to Jesus.* If he had not been afflicted with this terrible distemper, very probably he would not have concerned himself about the Redeemer. Behold! how true it is, that affliction leads men to God, that necessity teaches men to pray. We must therefore look upon crosses and sufferings not as evils, but as blessings in disguise, and employ them for our salvation. The leper adored Jesus, and said: "*Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*" We must also adore Jesus, really present in the Blessed Eucharist; we must bend our knees reverently when we come into the church, when we pass the altar or the tabernacle in which the Blessed Sacrament is kept. Many, like the Jews, only bend their knees half-way, as if they were mocking Christ. Remember that he who is now hidden under the species of bread, will, one day, be our Judge. "*Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*" Let us admire and imitate the strong faith of the leper. He does not doubt the omnipotence of Jesus — consequently, he believes in his Divinity when he says: "*Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*" Let us, also, imitate *his resignation to the will of God*; he does not say: "*Lord, thou must make me clean;*" he leaves the granting or refusing of his request to God. This *we* must do, especially when we pray for temporal things, which are not necessary for our salvation. God knows best what is good for us. We must pray as Christ prayed in the Garden of Olives: "*O my Father, if it is possible, let this chalice pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.*" (Matt. 26:39.) Let the short and ardent prayer of the leper be an exhortation to you frequently to repeat ejaculatory prayers with a loving heart, that thus you may comply with the command of Jesus to pray without ceasing. Short prayers, like those of the leper and the publican, are usually said without distraction, with great reverence and devotion, and, therefore, pierce the clouds.

3. "*And Jesus stretching forth his hand, touched him, saying: I will,*

be thou made clean. And forthwith his leprosy was cleansed." Jesus had compassion on him. While the leper was an abomination to others, Jesus touched him with his divine hand. He touched him, also, in order to show that he was above the ceremonial law which forbade coming in contact with lepers; and that a healing power proceeded from his adorable Flesh. This is a cause of consolation to the sinner. Although he should be despised by every one on account of his sins and vices, Jesus does not reject him, if he return with an humble and contrite heart, and entreat him to make him clean. By the words, "*I will, be thou made clean,*" Christ manifested his divine power. His Apostles and Saints also wrought miracles, but not, like Christ, in their own name. Jesus stretches forth his hand, and says: *I will.* This is the language of omnipotence; this is the language of God who, out of nothing, called the world into being by his almighty power. The Apostles and the Saints had recourse to God in prayer, full of faith and hope that he would grant them the power of working miracles, not in their own name, but in the name of Jesus, as St. Peter said to the man born lame: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk." (Acts 3:6.)

4. "*And Jesus said to him: See thou tell no man, but go, show thyself to the priest, and offer thy gift which Moses commanded for a testimony to them.*" Because Christ sought not his own honor, but the honor of his heavenly Father, he forbade the leper to manifest his miraculous cure. This ought to be a lesson to us to keep secret whatever good we may do, and not to speak of it through a motive of vanity or pride. If you have done a good work, do not boast of it. He who in the performance of good works does not seek the honor of God but his own, shall receive no reward hereafter, because he has already received his reward here on earth. Perhaps, Christ may also have cautioned the leper from a motive of prudence to keep the miracle a secret. If the priests had heard of the miracle before they had examined the leper—because of their hatred and envy of Christ—they might have refused to declare him clean. Herein, too, we should imitate Christ by keeping secret the good we or others do, if from its revelation evil consequences are likely to follow.

5. *The lepers, after being cleansed, according to the law of Moses were obliged to show themselves to the priests;* for the latter were appointed to examine them and to declare that they were really cured. Only then were they restored to their social privileges and allowed to mingle once more with the people. Thus, are we freed from sin only by the priest's absolution. The priests of the Old Law only declared the lepers clean after they had been cured, but the priests of the New

Law not only declare penitents free from sin, but really forgive sin by the power of God. If you were infected with leprosy, or any other disease, would you delay to show yourselves to the priests, if by so doing you would be healed of your malady? And yet there are those who carry about their spiritual leprosy, *sin*, for months and years without showing themselves to the priests of the Church, in order to be healed of the sickness of their soul by sacramental absolution!

6. *The cleansed lepers were obliged to offer a gift to God.* We, also, must be grateful to God after having received the pardon of our sins, and offer him the gift of a firm purpose of amendment, of a loving and undivided heart. And Jesus adds: “*For a testimony to them.*” The priests, after convincing themselves of the miraculous cure, should have believed that Christ was really the promised Messiah. Behold, God offers his grace to all men, even to his enemies! Let us not follow the example of those Jewish priests, who, having eyes, saw not, having ears, heard not; and who, refusing to avail themselves of the grace offered them, persevered to the bitter end in unbelief and sin.

II. THE HEALING OF THE CENTURION'S SERVANT. “*And when he had entered into Capharnaum, there came to him a centurion, beseeching him and saying: Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, and is grievously tormented.*”

1. Capharnaum was a city near the lake Genesareth, inhabited both by Jews and Gentiles. Christ frequently went there, taught there, and performed miracles. The centurion sets us a good example by his solicitude for his servant. He first sends his friends, “the ancients of the Jews,” to plead for him; and when he heard that Jesus was coming, he went out in person to meet him. Would that every head of a house would show the same solicitude for the members of his family, as this pagan centurion showed for his servant! Would that every parent would always remember those words of St. Paul: “If any man have not care of his own, and especially of those of his house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel!” (1 Tim. 5:8.)

2. It is recorded, in another part of the Gospel, that Jesus at first refused to grant the request of a certain Gentile woman who prayed him, in behalf of her daughter. But here he says, in relation to the centurion's servant: “*I will come and heal him.*” Why this readiness, this immediate response? Undoubtedly because of the centurion's active charity and zeal, as portrayed in the eulogium of the ancients: “He is worthy that thou shouldst do this for him, for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.” (Luke 7:4, 5.) From this

we learn how acceptable it is to God to provide for his house—the Church. Again: we may remark that besides refusing for a time to grant the petition of the Gentile woman, our Lord, on another occasion, being entreated by a certain ruler to come and heal his son, declined to go in person, but healed him from a distance. The centurion asks him in behalf of his servant, and forthwith he goes to his house. It was but natural for the father to ask relief for his son, and for the mother to pray in behalf of her daughter; but the centurion prayed in behalf of a servant, an inferior. He did not send the poor man away when he fell sick and caused him some inconvenience, but kept him in his house and provided for him, even going personally to Jesus to seek relief for him. A father could not treat his child more considerately than this good centurion treated his servant. Here we clearly see how we can make Jesus propitious to us; how we can gain his love and mercy. If we show mercy to others, God will show mercy to us; for with what measure we measure to others it shall be measured unto us again.

3. *“And the centurion, making answer, said: Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof; but only say the word, and my servant shall be healed.”* Let us admire the noble centurion’s profound humility, by which he was rendered worthy to believe the mystery of the divinity of Jesus Christ. The Father having “hid these things from the wise and prudent of this world, hath revealed them to the little ones.” (Matt. 11:25.) That he firmly believed in the divinity of Jesus Christ, is evident from his proclaiming him omnipotent. “Only say the word,” is a Hebrew phrase, signifying: Only command—and my servant shall be healed. We make use of these words before we go to holy Communion. Oh, that we would always repeat them with the faith, humility, and reverence of the good centurion!

4. *“For I also am a man subject to authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.”* I obey the orders of my superior officers, and my soldiers and servants instantly obey my bidding. Thou art the Sovereign Lord of all things; thou commandest diseases and corporal infirmities, and they disappear at thy word. How rare among Christians is such faith! It is owing to this want of living faith that our prayers are so cold, so distracted, so void of devotion and confidence; and that, in sufferings and afflictions, we are so easily dismayed.

5. *“And Jesus, hearing this, wondered and said to those that followed him: Amen, I say to you, I have not found so great faith in Israel.”*

Jesus expressed wonder and astonishment at this remarkable manifestation of faith on the part of a Gentile, either because now he saw by experience what he had ever known by his omniscience, or because he seized this opportunity to openly praise and commend to the bystanders the centurion's faith. When Jesus says that he had not found so great faith in Israel, he does not compare the faith of the centurion with the faith of the favored few immediately around him, such as the Apostles, but with the people of Israel in general.

6. *“And I say to you, that many shall come from the East and the West, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast into exterior darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”* The centurion being a Gentile, our Redeemer takes occasion to refer to the vocation of the Gentiles and the rejection of the Jews. Multitudes of the Gentiles, gathered together in the kingdom of heaven, shall sit down with the fathers of the faith, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, at the royal banquet, whilst the born children of the kingdom shall be cast out into the exterior darkness of hell, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The majority of the Jews remained incredulous and obstinate, and were, therefore, rejected; the Gentiles embraced the religion of Christ, and were saved. We, as Catholics, my dearly beloved, are now the children of the kingdom. If we do not wish to be rejected with the obstinate Jews, we must preserve our holy Catholic faith, and live according to its precepts.

Finally, our Lord adds: *“Go; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And the servant was healed at the same hour.”* There, again, Christ manifests himself as a God of mercy and love, always ready to assist where assistance is needed, and that in proportion as humility, faith, and confidence render us worthy of his aid. Whatever care or trouble we may have, let us, like the centurion, go to Christ and ask his help with an humble and confiding heart, and we shall most assuredly find the desired relief; for he has said: *“Come to me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.”* (Matt. 11:28.) Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THE TRIBULATIONS OF THE CHURCH.

“And behold, a great tempest arose in the sea, so that the ship was covered with waves; but he was asleep.” (Matt. 8: 24.)

In this ship of the Gospel, we behold a figure of the Bark of Peter, of the Church militant. Our Saviour is the pilot of both ships; and even though he now appears, at times, to sleep, as he did in the days of the Apostles, the Church can never suffer shipwreck, no matter how much she may be threatened by storms and tempests. God wishes to put our faith to the test through the tempests of tribulations. He would teach us *where* to seek our sure refuge, and upon *whom* to call, when we are in danger of perishing: “Lord, save us, we perish.” Let us, to-day, take into consideration the storms,—that is, the tribulations,—of our Mother, the Holy Catholic Church, let us reflect that they are

- I. *Grievous in her beginning;*
- II. *More grievous in her progress;* and
- III. *Most grievous at the present time.*

I. In the beginning, she lost the holy Martyrs, who were

1. The fearless confessors of the faith; and
2. Its brave and heroic defenders.

1. The foundations of the true faith were scarcely laid, before tyrants arose who used every endeavor to demolish them. No sooner was the Incarnate God born than the cruel Herod sought to put him to death. The Holy Innocents were obliged to sign with their blood the first confession of faith; and then might be seen the sad spectacle of “Rachel (the Church of God) weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted for them, because they are not.” (Jerem. 31: 15.)

2. After the massacre of the Innocents, the storms of persecution broke over both young and old; and thousands of Christian martyrs offered up their lives in attestation of their faith! We know the cruel rage of the tyrants, but we also know the invincible courage and constancy of these dauntless heroes. “Their blood was indeed the seed of faith;” but the Church suffered in union with her holy martyrs, for

by the death of each one she lost not only a loving son, but also a brave and fearless defender.

II. Greater still was her sorrow when the Church beheld :

1. *The heretics*, who refused to remain her loving sons ; and
2. *The apostates* who became her bitter enemies.

1. The heretics were once children of the Church ; and what evil did their great and loving Mother do to them ? She might justly complain : “ I have brought up children, and exalted them : but they have despised me.” (Isai. 1 : 2.) True, the Apostle has said : “ There must be also heresies ; that they also, who are approved, may be made manifest among you.” (1 Cor. 11 : 19.) But how heart-breaking is it to this devoted Mother to be obliged to say to those whom “ in Christ Jesus she begot through the Gospel : ” (1 Cor. 4 : 15) “ You are no longer my sons, but

2. You are my *bitter enemies*.” History shows how much pains these unfaithful sons have taken in order to utterly destroy their Mother. How often has the latter been forced to exclaim, with agonizing sorrow : “ My friends and my neighbors have drawn near, and stood against me ” ? (Ps. 37 : 12.) The sorrow grew with the danger. The whole world, at one time, seemed in league with the Arians, and the Bark of Peter was almost covered with the waves of false doctrine. The Pilot seemed to sleep, and permitted the storm, as St. Chrysostom says, so that, being saved, we may more clearly understand the goodness of our Deliverer. Scarcely a single century has passed from the beginning, wherein some unhappy sons of the Church have not separated from their Mother ; yea, not only *separated* from her, but *persecuted* her, alas ! as well !

III. At the present time, the Church is most tried by her own children. Although they profess to believe in all her doctrines, they contradict her

1. Partly *in their morals* ; and
2. Partly *in their words*.

1. Is it to our honor, my dear brethren, that we call ourselves Christians, whilst, at the same time, our lives are a dishonor and a shame to Christ ? How many take pride in saying : “ I am a Roman Catholic ; ” but how many of these “ confess that they know God, ” while “ in their deeds they deny him ” ? (Titus 1 : 16.)

2. But this is not enough. In this enlightened age of ours, there are certain so-called Catholics who glory in holding up the rites and ceremonies of the Church (many of which have come down to us through sacred tradition) as objects of scorn and mockery. What does our sorrowful Mother, the Holy Catholic Church, think of such children? She mournfully exclaims: "If my enemy had reviled me, I would verily have borne with it;" (Ps. 54:13) but thou, my son!— "Behold, in peace is my bitterness most bitter!" (Isai. 38:17.) In what sort of peace? A peace with the heathens, a peace with the heretics, but not with her own sons, as St. Bernard forcibly observes.

Most justly, then, in these days of infidelity and immorality, may we call upon our Saviour: "Lord, save us, we perish!" In past ages, thou hast delivered thy Church from many storms and perils of persecution and heresy; purify our hearts also from all their sinful inclinations; for every heart is in danger of as many storms as it has unsubdued passions. Oh, how often have we been on the verge of shipwreck and eternal ruin! How many griefs have we, degenerate sons, caused our holy Mother, the Catholic Church of God! Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THE SUFFERINGS OF HUMAN LIFE.

“Behold, a great tempest arose in the sea, so that the boat was covered with waves ; but he was asleep.” (Matt. 8 : 24.)

Menaced by innumerable dangers, we steer our course over the billows of Time towards the great harbor of Eternity. We carry within us a precious cargo, an immortal soul, marked with the image of the Triune God, and redeemed with the blood of Jesus Christ. It is our duty to deliver that cargo safely at its destination, and when many and dangerous tempests arise, and wild waves of temptation break over our bark, we are often forced to cry out: “Lord, save us, we perish.”

Why these storms on the ocean of Life? Why these bitter waves of suffering, which are continually rolling over our tiny vessels? Manifold are the sufferings which we meet with in the lives of the good as well as the bad, in the abodes alike of prosperity and poverty. The palaces of kings are no more exempt than the hut of the beggar. Every man carries a portion of this common misery. Were it granted me this hour, to lift the veil from each heart here before me, gaze down into its depths, I would there find a cross of which its next neighbor knows nothing, but which on that very account is only the more oppressive.

“All who will live piously in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” (2 Tim. 3 : 12.) Yea, the very best and most virtuous are tried in the crucible of sufferings, like St. Paul, of whom God said to Ananias: “I will show him how great things he must suffer for the sake of my name.” (Acts 9 : 16.) Now, these afflictions and trials which are the common lot of man, holy Faith teaches us to contemplate from three points of view. They are :

- I. *A consequence of sin ;*
- II. *A school of virtue ; and*
- III. *A source of merit.*

I. For thousands of years, man's natural reason has vainly endeavored to solve the difficult problem of human misery and woe. In reviewing these unsuccessful efforts, we are forcibly reminded of those three friends of Job, of whom the Scripture says: “*They had made an appointment to come together and visit him, and comfort him. And when*

they had lifted up their eyes afar off, they knew him not ; and crying out, they wept, and rending their garments, they sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven. And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no man spoke to him a word : for they saw that his grief was very great.” (Job 2 : 11-13.) Reason may raise its voice and attempt to comfort ; it may cast the vain dust of its words and questions toward heaven ; man may weep and lament at the sight of his own and others’ troubles and afflictions, but his natural reason fails to find a truly healing, comforting explanation thereof.

1. Faith tells us that sin is the only source of all human sufferings and trials. Man was not created by God for sufferings. Holy Scriptures call the place in which the Lord placed our first parents, the Paradise of delights, and in this paradise of delights, not in a valley of tears, all men were to dwell. Our first parents were to cultivate and till that garden of joy. By obedience to God’s holy commandments, they were to guard the unprofaned soil of the earth against the entrance of sin and evil. But they sinned and were driven from the abode of their happiness.

2. There is but one pain, but one real affliction, in this world—*Sin*, whose punishment we endure. Because of it, we are rejected and cast off from God’s sight, and wander about upon an accursed earth. Whatever else we call sufferings,—such as temporal evils, sickness, death, and the vast army of mundane cares and troubles, all are the consequences of this one great evil—*Sin*.

3. Can we, therefore, wonder or complain, if we are subjected to the universal lot ? Must we bitterly repine, if the Lord refuses to exempt us from the general law of sufferings ? Every child of Adam, born of a sinful mother, and living on the accursed soil of this earth, must expect to meet with trials and tribulations. Without sufferings, he would not be a member of the human family. Anti-Misery and Anti-Poverty Societies are, therefore, vain institutions. The most beneficent civil laws and ordinances are powerless to banish poverty and woe from the dwellings of man. The wisest and most circumspect statesmanship fails to keep misfortune from its clients. The highest medical skill will neither lessen the number of diseases, nor disarm Death of his destroying scythe. Our good God has permitted a partial alleviation of earthly misery and woe, but not their entire removal. Man may not abolish the sentence of divine justice. The rich complain, as well as the poor, —nay, oftentimes, more than the poor ; master and servant each endure the distinctive trials of their state ; parents of many children are —sometimes—sadder than the childless. Do you not see, then, that the fault lies not in our condition, but *in ourselves* ?

4. Yes, the universal curse is augmented and aggravated by *our own personal sins*. Our Lord visits our iniquities with a rod, and our crimes with stripes. Sin committed with pleasure, must be atoned for by suffering. Innumerable tribulations were the divine punishment for the sin of Adam ; and every new sin is chastised by the Lord by the infliction of fresh sorrows. We would be spared much temporal affliction and unhappiness had we committed fewer sins ! “ We have sinned with our fathers, we have acted unjustly, we have wrought iniquity.” (Ps. 105 : 6.)

5. The sinner usually wears a smiling face. He drinks in iniquity like water, wipes his mouth, and says : “ I have sinned, and what evil has befallen me ? ” Nevertheless, every sin demands punishment and expiation. The least venial sin is more disastrous in its effects than the overthrow of all thrones and kingdoms, and the destruction of the entire visible world. Every sin draws after it a heavy chain of chastisements and sorrows ; and long after the commission of a sinful act, the development of its momentous consequences prepares for the sinner unspeakable anxiety and woe. If divine justice has continued for six thousand years to visit upon all men the punishment of Adam’s sin; if, because of sin, the Son of God was obliged to undergo all the terrible tortures of his Passion and Death; and if the sin of the Angels was capable of opening at once an abyss of everlasting punishment, can we be astonished if God, with the same justice, chastises each of our sins by pains and sufferings ?

II. If we bear these sufferings patiently, however, they will prove for us a *school of virtue*, wherein we shall be powerfully drawn to the love of God.

1. We are all more frivolous than we know or are willing to acknowledge. Most of us walk with our eyes fixed upon the earth. The illusions of this life, and the vile attractions of earthly goods and joys, draw us away from God and blind us to contemplation of the eternal bliss awaiting us. But we must not love the world. We must hate it, and its goods ; and despise and flee from its lusts, however attractively they may smile on us, or how muchsoever they may flatter our sensual hearts.

To this end, our Lord pours bitter wormwood into the cup of life, and mixes its sweet wine with gall and vinegar. He purposely disgusts us with the world, so that, being detached from it, we may remember our true home—Heaven. He feeds us with the husks of *the Prodigal Son* ; he permits us to feed swine, as it were, and be degraded in the eyes of the world, so that, out of the midst of our misery and need, we may arise and return to our Father.

Have we not often experienced the beneficial influence of these trials upon our souls? When overwhelmed by heavy afflictions and bereavements, when oppressed by the dark clouds of care and grief, in the long hours of sad days and sleepless nights, have we not thought of many things that never entered our minds in happier times, or, at best, made but a feeble impression upon our souls? Did not our life, in such moments, suddenly appear to us in an entirely different light? Drawn to the feet of our Lord with gentle, but irresistible power, we then exclaimed in the words of the Prodigal Son: "I will arise, and will go to my Father and say to him: I have sinned against heaven and before thee, I am not now worthy to be called thy son." (Luke 15: 18, 19.)

2. Sufferings and afflictions make us truly pious and virtuous. The human heart is hard. It must first become soft like wax if it would receive the impression of those virtues which our Saviour demands, and which he and his Saints have practised. The glowing heat of affliction is best calculated to make the metal of our soul fit and ready for the molding of the divine Master.

a. Sufferings make man serious, they lead him to appreciate life in its highest significance. "It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting; for in that we are put in mind of the end of all, and the living thinketh what is to come." (Eccles. 7: 3.) The gloomy background of life, eternity and its admonitions, are only brought out before the soul by the sharp pencil of affliction. Sorrow elevates him to that holy gravity which distinguishes the Christian from the playful child or the fool. How widely different are the thoughts and feelings of a young person from those of a man ripened by experience! The seriousness of life weighs heavily upon the heart and conscience of every sensible adult. And are not such views engendered, as a rule, by bitter experience? Sufferings elevate man to higher and grander thoughts, and tell him loudly and impressively that the joys and goods of this life are only show and illusions, and that if he would find his true reward, he must mount upwards to grasp it—the ladder of toil and care, and by Christian repentance. Many people would never rise to a serious thought, if trouble and affliction did not lead the way.

b. Sufferings admonish us to humility, to confidence in God, to prayer, and to all those virtues which the realization of what life is in its true meaning and form, demand of us. St. Bernard says truly, "Virtues increase by God's chastisements; sins decrease and become fewer; the things of earth are despised, the heavenly ones loved." Pride, which trusts in itself, or grounds its hopes upon any earthly good, is easiest broken by sufferings. Tribulation compels man to place his

whole confidence in that Mighty One who alone is our powerful helper and deliverer.

c. Sufferings and tribulations incite us also to a greater love of our neighbor. They make us meek, and inclined to forgive; they make us benevolent and merciful. They open man's heart with violence, so that, feeling his own distresses, he better recognizes and estimates the sorrows and cares of others. Why, then, cry and complain when our Lord calls us to himself by sufferings and tribulations, and constrains us to the practice of so many virtues? Should we not, at such times, exclaim: "It is good for me that thou hast humbled me, that I may learn thy justifications." (Ps. 18: 71.) Suffering is the bitter, but necessary, medicine that secures the health and salvation of our souls. As the sick man willingly and gladly takes the most nauseating draught, when it is necessary for his cure—as he undergoes the most painful operations and amputations to save his life, so must we view every suffering, every mundane misery as a necessary and salutary medicine for the salvation of our souls. At such moments, let us cry out with St. Augustine: "Here burn, here cut, O Lord, but spare me for eternity!"

III. The Sacred Scriptures tell us that God loves those whom he chastises; hence Christian faith sees, in the trials and tribulations of life, a proof of the special grace and love of God.

1. *They test the worth of our souls,*
2. *They blot out the stains of sin and remit the punishment due to it;*
3. *They obtain for us the highest reward.*

1. The Holy Scriptures say of the souls of the just: "Afflicted in few things, in many they shall be well rewarded: because God hath tried them and found them worthy of himself. As gold in the furnace he hath proved them; and as a victim of a holocaust he hath received them; and in time there shall be respect had to them." (Wisdom 3: 5, 6.) Sufferings are the test of the soul, the touch-stone of its actual worth before God. As certain jewels shine only in the dark, so virtue glistens with the greatest brilliancy amid the shadows of adversity. He who remains virtuous in the greatest afflictions, and in the bitterest necessities of life, and at the same time, overcomes temptation, is truly pious. He is a genuine diamond, on which the power of the infernal hammer is tried in vain. He who is not able to exclaim with Job, in his afflictions and deprivations: "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; as it pleased the Lord, so has it happened; blessed be the name of the Lord," (Job 2)—cannot boast of genuine and perfect virtue!

2. *Sufferings and tribulations have, at the same time, a purgative effect upon the soul.* They are the purgatory of this world. As gold comes forth from the furnace with a new brilliancy, a finer luster, purified from all dross and from every impure ingredient, so does man's soul shine forth in the splendor of higher purity, when it has gone through the fire of probation. Every sinful inclination, every inordinate love, every attachment to earthly possessions, will be dislodged and removed by those purifying flames. The soul shall come forth from the furnace of distress and disappointment, washed clean from every stain of evil.

3. Overwhelming will be our joy when we think of *the eternal reward* which our Lord reserves for his patient and long-suffering servants. "Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven," (Matt. 5: 12) said our Saviour of those who suffer and endure for his name's sake. The greater the sacrifice made for God, the more difficult the virtues practised, the more liberal and delicious will be the reward. The instruments of the Passion of Jesus Christ, are his glory now in heaven. The wounds which man inflicted upon him, shine upon his glorified body, as signs of his eternal triumph. The cross on which he died shall appear as a glorious symbol, when he shall come to judgment in the splendor of his majesty. Our sufferings, too, shall be the cause of our glory in heaven! The thorny crown of sufferings with which our Lord here encircles the brows of his elect, will be changed into this sweet and radiant heavenly crown. That which we have endured for love of him shall be more richly rewarded than all other labors for the honor of God. The hours of affliction will be the richest in blessings of all the moments of our lives. Their benediction and reward will be our eternal felicity.

St. Catharine of Sienna relates, that, in a vision, our Lord once offered for her choice, a crown of roses and a crown of thorns. The saint took the latter because it was more like the crown of her divine spouse. "Either to suffer or to die!" said St. Theresa. All the Saints spoke in this manner, because they knew that the way of the cross is the shortest and safest road to eternal happiness. They *chose* voluntary sufferings as the royal road to salvation. If the love of our Saviour can not elevate us to such a resolution, let us, at least, bear the sufferings which his goodness and wisdom send us, with Christian resignation; so that the afflictions which oppress us as a consequence of sin, may become for us a school of virtue and a source of merit! Amen.

BISHOP EHRLER.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.

“The kingdom of heaven is likened to a man that sowed good seed in his field.” (Matth. 13: 24.)

By the good seed, of which our Saviour speaks, to-day, is meant the word of God. Now, he that receives the word with joy, and practises its precepts, is like a good field which brings forth fruit a hundred fold. Dearly beloved, in what does the purport of these divine words, and of the whole of Christianity, consist? It is contained chiefly in these words: “Be you, therefore, perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matth. 5: 48.) There are many who entertain the false opinion that only priests and Religious are bound to aspire to perfection. No; let me assure you that:

- I. *Every state of life admits of a certain perfection;*
- II. *In every state of life, Christians are able to attain perfection.*

I. The whole aim of Christianity is directed to the perfect union of men with God. Hence to this aim are obliged

1. *Christians all over the world;* and
2. *Christians of every condition.*

1. All these reach their perfection, only when they have attained the ultimate end of their creation. Man, then, is only perfect when he is wholly united to God, when he depends upon him as the last end and single aim of his existence. “The end of the law is Christ,” says the Apostle; (Rom. 10: 4) and commenting on this passage, St. Augustine most beautifully remarks: “Our end is Christ, and our perfection is to come to him.” If you are now perfectly united to him, then seek no further; for he is your end. In like manner, when you have reached the end of your life, you cease to struggle, or desire further length of days, because you have reached your end. God is your end, after whom you have striven. He was perfectly united to this object of his love, who could say of himself: “I live, now, not I; but Christ liveth in me;” (Gal. 2: 20) and since this union was chiefly effected by love, he, (St. Paul) indicates the perfection of this union by those other impressive words: “Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation? or distress? or famine? or nakedness? or

danger? or persecution? or the sword? For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God." (Rom. 8: 35-38.) "God is charity: and he that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him." (1 John 4: 16.) Unless the Christian himself wills it, he can never be separated from God: for love is a bond which binds together the lover and his beloved, and unites them so closely that they become as one person: "He who adheres to the Lord, is one spirit." (1. Cor. 6: 17.) And because this is our end and aim, our hearts can never find rest until they are united to God and perfectly repose in him.

2. We are obliged, in every condition of life, to strive after this end. Even in the Old Law, God commanded Abraham: "Walk before me and be perfect." (Gen. 17: 1.) Yes, to the whole of the Israelites it was said: "Thou shalt be perfect, and without spot before the Lord thy God." (Deut. 18: 13.) "Be you, therefore, perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matth. 5: 48.) This command was not annulled with the Old Law. Was not John, the Precursor of Christ, sent expressly "to prepare for the Lord a perfect people?" (Luke 1: 17.) After our Lord had taught and commanded us: "Be you, therefore, perfect," the Apostles, speaking in his name, repeated the same injunction: "Be perfect." (2 Cor. 13: 11.) "Wherefore, take unto you the armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect." (Ephes. 6: 13.) Does this precept apply only to those in the religious or sacerdotal state, or is it not binding upon all states of life? True, all conditions of life are not bound to use the same means to attain perfection as those which are obligatory upon clerics and Religious, such as voluntary Poverty, perfect Chastity, and implicit Obedience; but although we may all travel by different paths, we meet at last at the same goal, and this goal it is the duty of all Christians to strive for. "Love therefore is the fulfilling of the law." (Rom. 13: 10.) To unite ourselves to God, to love him with our whole heart, with our whole soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength, is what all are bound to do who have been baptized. Behold! my dearly beloved, the rule which, by your baptism, you have bound yourself to follow.

II. As regards the attaining of Christian perfection, I beg you to remark that the means of perfection may be found

1. *In every state of life*; and that
2. *There have been perfect servants of God in every condition of life.*

1. The love of God and of our neighbor is either perfection itself, or the nearest step to it. Can you mention a state, short of one abounding in deliberately sinful occasions, in which man can not love God with his whole heart, and his neighbor as himself? "In order to preserve this love," says St. Augustine, "one must mortify his passions until he scarcely feels them any more." But is not one obliged to this in every state? Yes! without mortification one can not keep the commandments of God, much less attain perfection. God commands all to "decline from evil and do good." (Ps. 36: 27.) If one is assiduous in complying with this command, he is also earnest in his efforts towards perfection, and this assiduity may well be called perfection itself. "Put off the old man," says St. Paul: "and put on the new man, who, according to God, is created in justice, and holiness of truth." (Ephes. 4: 22, 24.) What else does this mean, than to aspire to perfection? And is not this possible in every state of life? Has not every man means and occasions of rooting out vices, and planting virtues in their stead? Can not he, in every state, be humble, meek, pious, zealous in the service of God, chaste, temperate, in a word, virtuous, and always increasing in virtue? He who would deny this, must shamelessly speak against his own conscience.

2. But how if I should show that there have been holy and perfect people in every state of life? Then, all must acknowledge that perfection is possible in all states and conditions. Even in the Old Law, Noe was praised as "a just and perfect man;" (Gen. 6: 9;) and David, as "a man after God's own heart." (2 Kings.) We read in the New Testament that "There was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon; and this man was just and devout." (Luke 2: 25.) We know that Joseph, Zacharias, Elizabeth, and all the Apostles were just people. If we read the history of the Church we meet with examples of perfection in all ages, states, and conditions. There were holy emperors and kings,—such as Ladislaus, Henry, and Louis. There were holy courtiers, as Sir Thomas More and Engelbert; holy soldiers and generals, holy citizens, mechanics, and laborers, and many others, whom time will not permit me to enumerate. But I call upon your own consciences as my witnesses; could not each one of you, in his own appointed station, become holy and perfect? There is no doubt of it, each one of you could become a saint, if he would only will it.

"*Go, teach all nations.*" Teach them what? Our Saviour did not say: Teach them simply to believe that I am come as the true Messias, but teach "them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matth. 28: 20.) You know now your duty, but woe to you if

you do not fulfil it, or, (still worse,) if you despise it ! Do not pride yourselves upon bearing the glorious name of Christian, if you do not comply with the sacred duties attached to it. " What shall it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but hath not works ? Shall faith be able to save him ? " (James 2: 14.) " Even so, faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself." (James 2: 17.) How foolish, then, are those who promise themselves eternal life as the result of a dead faith ! A true Christian must follow Christ : otherwise, he does not deserve the name of Christian. Or, what will the name avail him, if it is, to him, as an empty and profitless name ? It is not sufficient for a Christian to profess his faith ; he must also have the spirit of Christ. He must not only believe, he must manifest his faith by works. In short, he must keep the commandments, of which this is the epitome : " BE PERFECT ! "

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

BAD COMPANY.

“While men were asleep, his enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat, and went his way.” (Matth. 13:25.)

At the request of his disciples, my dear brethren, our divine Lord explained to them the parable of the cockle and the wheat, read in to-day's Gospel. The field in which both are sown, (he gave them to understand,) is the world; the good grain signifying good and just souls, whilst the cockle represents the wicked and reprobate. Christ himself is the sower of the good seed; but he who scatters the cockle, is the Evil One, the sworn enemy of God and man. The time of the harvest will be the end of the world; when the cockle, *i. e.*, sinners, shall be cast into the bottomless pit of hell, there to burn in everlasting fires; but when the good grain, *i. e.*, the faithful servants of God, shall be transported into the heavenly Jerusalem, there to enjoy the Beatific Vision, and shine like stars for all eternity.

1. Man, my dear brethren, came forth from the hands of his Creator, perfect in the order of grace, as well as in that of nature. His passions were entirely subject to reason, and reason was the mistress of all his actions; but when he violated God's command, his intellect became obscured, his will depraved, and his passions violently rebellious. Sad, indeed, were the effects of Adam's sin for us, his children! Thereby, alas! the order established by divine Providence was perverted, the slave became master, and the master, slave; and degraded, as we are, from our high estate, it is only by a long and persistent struggle that we are able to bring our passions into proper subjection. “The life of man,” says holy Job, “is a continual warfare on earth.” Yes, brethren, if we wish to do anything for our poor souls, if we wish to secure our salvation, we must fight continually and courageously against our corrupt nature, arming ourselves with God's grace, which can always be obtained in prayer and the holy Sacraments.

2. But, dear brethren, were our struggle confined merely to the combat with our own unruly passions, our case would not be so deplorable; we have also to struggle against another deadly foe,—namely, *the world*, and *the scandals* and *bad examples* with which it abounds. Our present age is, unhappily, a most perverse one. Iniquity and crime are ever on the ascendant among us: and the laws of justice and

morality seem to have been altogether obliterated from the minds of men. What is your own experience in this matter? Cast a rapid glance at the condition of modern society,—at the state of affairs going on daily around you. Things seem to have changed names in these disordered times. Virtue is called vice, and vice virtue. How, then, shall we be able to bear up against the current, and secure that great and only affair, for which we were created,—our eternal salvation?—If one thing only is necessary, and all other things are only vanity and affliction of spirit, where shall we find a remedy for our modern evils, dear brethren, an antidote for the evil influence of scandal and bad example? Perhaps, you will suggest, the utter extinction, the complete annihilation of all sinners and workers of iniquity? No, Jesus Christ, in this day's Gospel, decrees that both the wheat and the cockle, the good and the bad, shall “grow up to the time of the harvest.” The wicked, (as St. Augustine explains,) are permitted to live, either that they may have time to amend their lives, or that they may be an occasion of merit to the just.

3. Shall we separate ourselves altogether from these unworthy ones, and refuse to mix with them at all? No, dear brethren, such a course is neither possible nor expedient. To carry it into execution we would be forced, (as St. Paul says, when treating of the matter,) to quit the world altogether. Ah! my beloved, our wisdom and our salvation lie in this case, as in most cases, in the golden mean. Without exhausting our strength on the uprooting of the cockle, we must avoid, as much as possible, the company of the wicked, and all familiarity with evil. If necessity, or just cause, however, should throw us unwillingly into such associations, we must firmly resist their scandalous influence, putting on, as the Apostle says, the armor of light—that is, having recourse to God by prayer, beseeching his grace, that we may not be seduced or drawn into sin.

4. Happy are they who act in this circumspect manner! Seeing evil committed they are not scandalized thereat; because the love of God is rooted deeply in their hearts. But alas! my brethren, where shall we find these edifying Christians now-a-days? Ah! I would venture to assert, as St. John Chrysostom did in his own day, that there is scarcely one amidst every one hundred thousand,—all the rest are so imperfect and frail that our Saviour compares them to weak children. With such innate weakness and imperfections, then, with all the fatal tendencies of corrupt nature towards evil, how shall we be able to keep company with the wicked and impious, and yet have strength to repel the almost irresistible force of their bad example? Ah, miserable that we are, without wishing or perceiving it, if we continue to

frequent the society of sinners, little by little we become followers of all their false maxims, imitators of all their vices, and admirers of their dissipated and irregular habits. This is an undisputed fact, confirmed by daily experience. The woman, (be she old or young,) who frequents the company of other vain, frivolous and ambitious women, acknowledged devotees of fashion and folly, becomes in a short time an admirer of all their wild absurdities, and, unconsciously to herself, adopts the very language and habits of her empty-headed associates. In like manner, the man who keeps company with gamblers, drunkards, libertines, and profligate worldlings, soon, in his turn, begins to gamble, drink, and frequent the vile haunts of unlawful pleasure. Of deliberate contact with every vice the common saying is true : "He who touches pitch must expect to be defiled;" or that other proverb so well known to you all : "Show me your company and I'll tell you what you are." "Friendship," as St. John Chrysostom says, "either finds or makes friends equal."

5. In the *Confessions* of St. Augustine we read that, having before his conversion frequented bad company, he not only became vicious and dissipated like his associates, but even gloried in his vices, and felt ashamed of practising virtue, and performing good works. "I was ashamed," said he, "to appear virtuous." Alas ! how many of both sexes, especially among the young, give expression to the same sentiment, if not by word of mouth, at least by their conduct and mode of life. Yonder, for example, is a young man who once wished to lead a pious life ; who gladly frequented the house of God and the holy Sacraments ; who found a certain pure delight in prayer, in the hearing of sermons, and the reading of good books. But, alas ! because that young man frequented the company of the wicked, who never go to either Church or Sacraments, who scoff at prayer and pious practices, and openly indulge in the most degrading vices, dragged down into the mire of sin by their bad example, and fearing to be regarded as narrow-minded and scrupulous, he too has become a stranger to the house of God. Prayer and the Sacraments are utterly neglected ; and this modern Augustine cries out in the midst of his vice and misery, "I am ashamed to appear virtuous."

So with many a virtuous young woman, who trusts to her own strength and good resolutions, and chooses for her companions, those silly gad-abouts of women who are seen in doubtful places of amusement at the most unseasonable hours ; who are bold and free in their intercourse with men and, on all occasions, are altogether forgetful of that modesty which is the brightest jewel of their sex. Too soon does she begin to imitate them in gratifying her vanity and love of luxury, no matter by what anti-Christian means ; and she even goes so far

in the end as to enter the house of God, as they do, with as worldly motives as they frequent the ball-room and theater, seeking before thy very sanctuary, O outraged God ! fresh fuel for their vanity and lust !

6. Thus, also, with the upright man who seeks with pleasure and deliberation the society of the deceitful and the fraudulent. "If others can amass riches by a few little doubtful tricks and manœuvres,"—he questions—"Why not I?" And soon society is corrupted by the presence of another rogue and embezzler. Ah ! dear brethren, too true is that comparison of St. Basil's, wherein he says, that as the air which is breathed in pestiferous places insensibly infects the inhabitants thereof, in like manner the good are poisoned by contact with evil company before they perceive the danger in which they stand. The word of God himself, declares that "whoever shall frequent the company of a proud man, will also become proud ;" and that "he who loves the danger will perish in it." Would you know, dear brethren, why the Jewish people, the chosen and favored people of God, violated the divine commandment to such an extent, as to forsake the true God, and adore in his stead, idols of wood, stone, and metal? The Holy Ghost himself gives us the reason: "Because they mixed with the Gentiles and the pagans, and learned their evil works." And St. Bernard declares that St. Peter denied our Lord, "because he was at that time in the company of the enemies of his divine Master."

7. Ah! my brethren, how cautious we should be in our present perverse age, an age already foretold by the Apostle when he said that, "dangerous times will yet be at hand !" How many have we now-a-days amongst us, maliciously and wickedly bent upon the corruption of others? How many scorpions always seeking to wound the incautious with their poisonous sting ! Good God ! What blasphemies are uttered by these impious men ! "There is no God," they boldly exclaim: or, if there is, he has no concern for the welfare of his creatures. . .

. . . Heaven is a mere romance ; eternity a fable. Virtue is an illusion; the truths of our holy religion, the maxims of the Gospel, are only dreams and vain inventions. . . . Humility lowers the dignity of manhood, and piety degrades it. . . . Mass, Sacraments, rosaries, prayers, sermons, and pious books, are nothing more than the mad mummeries of fanatics and fools !" Such, dear brethren, are some of the modern blasphemies uttered all around us by "an evil and adulterous generation." Ah ! beloved brethren, beware of these blasphemous sinners ; they are not merely evil through human weakness,—they are cunning, malicious demons under the form of men. Nay, I will say more ; they are worse than the demons themselves, since, by their false maxims and perverse counsels, so flattering to

human passions, they effect greater havoc in pure souls, than all the infernal spirits put together. The latter may tempt us by their evil suggestions, but they may not give us personally a bad example. Indeed, if they appeared to us bodily, and sought to appeal to our senses, we would flee with horror from the terrible apparition. Not so with the agents of hell ; for such are all evil companions. They present themselves before us with a pleasing aspect ; they insinuate something that flatters self-love and our evil propensities, and under the pretext of friendship, they seduce us through our passions, and thus drag us deeper into the abyss of vice, than all the united powers of hell could do. Hence it is, that the Evil One makes every effort to enlist wicked men and women in his service, being well aware that he could effect a wider ruin among souls by one such sinner, than he could by a hundred of his own infernal spirits.

8. Will you tell me, after all this, that it is a harmless thing to keep bad company ? And you, who are forced by your state or occupations to associate against your will with evil company, what precautions are you taking to avoid being seduced by their corrupt example ? Ah ! dear brethren, far from exaggerating, or deceiving you, in this matter, I have but given you the doctrine of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, enforced by the example of his Blessed Mother and his Saints. Be not deceived by self-love or your passions ; the keeping of evil company, and the influence of bad example are the principal sources whence proceed the torrents of iniquity, with which the world is at present inundated. There may be now here before me persons who habitually keep bad company, as well as those whose scandalous and dissipated lives are the occasion of their sin. To each of these classes I address myself to-day. O all you bad Christians who indulge in evil associations, do you wish to rise from your present state of tepidity and lukewarmness, and return to God with your whole hearts and souls ? Do you wish to avoid all future sins, and thus secure your eternal salvation ? If you *do* the first step towards repentance must be *the giving up of bad company*. Otherwise, you will daily sink deeper and deeper in the slough of vice, you will openly give over the possession of your poor souls to the devil both in this life and in the life to come.

A closing word to parents and superiors—and then I have done.

O Christian fathers and mothers ! are you continually on your guard to prevent your children from associating with dangerous companions ? Remember that God has intrusted these little ones to your charge, that you may bring them up in his fear and love. You will have to give a rigorous account of their souls on the day of judgment ; our Lord Jesus Christ will strictly examine as to your diligence in pre-

serving them from every evil association and occasion of sin. What, then, will he say on the Last Day to those parents, who not only have used no efforts to keep their children away from bad company, but have been themselves the ministers of Satan to them, instilling evil principles into their minds, or scandalizing them by their disorderly, irreligious lives? Ah! he will say to them: "It would have been better for you if you had never been born. Instead of securing the salvation of their souls you have plunged them by your bad example and counsels into eternal ruin! You and they are alike everlastingly lost. Depart, then, depart forever from my presence into the quenchless fires of hell!"

O Christian masters and superiors, you too must watch continually over your dependents lest they be seduced and corrupted by evil, immoral companions. Let the keen eye of holy vigilance be ever open in the household, in the shop, in the factories, and on the streets. Let every Christian vie with his neighbor in giving edification, parents with their children, and children with their parents; brothers with their sisters, and sisters with their brothers; masters with their servants, and servants with their masters; and thus may we all, dear brethren, by our united efforts spread the kingdom of God daily, more and more, and counteract the efforts of those who by their disedifying lives are endeavoring to spread abroad the kingdom of Satan and of Sin. That you may be the better able to effect your holy purpose, have continual recourse to Mary, the loving Mother of God, and our fond Mother, also. She is the model of perfection, and no human being ever led a more exemplary life than she. Let us then, by imitating her virtues, and by frequently invoking her powerful intercession, render her propitious in our regard. Call upon her continually and confidingly; for her maternal heart is ever burning with solicitude for our temporal and eternal welfare. Her devout client is ever a match for the united powers of hell; since we read in her sacred office, that "she is terrible as an army set in array." Recommend yourselves also daily to her spouse, the good and benevolent St. Joseph—to your angel guardian—and your holy patron Saints, that they may obtain for you all the grace you need; especially, the grace to avoid all dangerous society, or, if you are forced to frequent it against your will, the grace to be protected from all its evils and enervating influences. Thus, at last, my beloved, having fought the good fight, having brought your unruly passions under due subjection, you may, one day, reap the reward of your labors in heaven, by being admitted to the eternal society of Jesus and Mary, and of all the Angels and Saints. Amen.

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SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THE BEGINNING AND GROWTH OF THE CHURCH OF GOD.

“The kingdom of Heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field : which indeed is the least of all seeds : but when it is grown up, it is greater than any herbs, and becometh a tree.”

(Matt. 13 : 31-32.)

By the kingdom of heaven, here spoken of, is meant the Church of God. The Scribes and Pharisees always entertained the opinion that the Messias would come into the world as the King of Glory. “And when he was asked by the Pharisees : when the kingdom of God should come ! he, answering them, said : The kingdom of God cometh not with observation.” (Luke 17 : 20.) “The time is accomplished, and the kingdom of God is at hand ; repent and believe the gospel.” (Mark 1 : 15.) These would-be sages refused to believe unless they saw. Our Saviour rebuked their incredulity, when he said : “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation,” that is, with splendor and pomp ; “Neither shall they say : Behold here, or behold there” (Luke 17 : 21); that is, the kingdom of God will not be established in this, or that city, “For lo, the kingdom of God is within you.” The kingdom of God and the Church are one and the same. We will, to-day, consider this Church.

I. *As a grain of mustard seed, and*
 II. *As a tree.*

I. The Church of God, in the beginning, resembled a grain of mustard seed, whether we consider

1. *Her Author,*
2. *Her followers, or*
3. *Her doctrines.*

1. *Her Author* was Jesus Christ, our Saviour. And how little was he esteemed in the eyes of men, during his mortal life ! He was reputed as anything else but the Son of God; for they cried out : “Is not this the carpenter’s son ?” (Matt. 13 : 55.) Was he not the cornerstone which was rejected by those who wished to build a new church ? Did not the priests and the Pharisees pronounce him a seducer of the people ? Did they not declare that no one believed in him but the

common rabble, "who knew not the law?" (John 7: 39.) Did he not "debase himself, taking the form of a servant"? (Philip. 2: 7.) Did he not say of himself: "I am a worm, and no man; the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people?" (Ps. 21: 7.)

2. Who were his first *followers*? Poor, ignorant, insignificant laborers, fishermen, of whom the bravest denied his Master, while the rest wholly deserted him. St. Paul describes their lowly condition: "We are without honor. Even unto this hour, we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no fixed abode. * * * We are made as the refuse of this world, the off-scouring of all, even till now." (1 Cor. 4: 10, 11, 13.)

3. *His doctrines* themselves, in the beginning, seemed very contemptible. They were regarded as error. "Are you also seduced?" (John 7: 47) said the Pharisees to their servants, who believed in Christ. The preaching of the holy Apostles was "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Gentiles foolishness." (1 Cor. 1: 23.) "They compared the doctrine of Christ with the teachings of the philosophers, with their books and their eloquence: and how insignificant they esteemed the former by comparison with the latter." (St. Jerome.) Without oratorical adornments, without sophistical arts, without high-sounding words, did Christ propound his dogmas; dogmas which did not flatter the passions of man, but which were solely aimed at the improvement of the human heart.

II. But, through just such proofs as these, are we led to consider the Church *as a tree* in its growth.

1. Notwithstanding the persecutions of the Jews, the fame of our Saviour was so wide-spread that all were attracted to him. "And I," said he of himself, "if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself." (John 12: 32.) His enemies were obliged to confess: "Behold, the whole world is gone after him." (John 12: 19.) His death was as glorious as it was ignominious. All nature, together with every creature, was troubled. The veil of the Temple was rent asunder, as a sign that the Giver of the New Law was present.

2. And how wonderfully did he disseminate his doctrine! St. Augustine says that by a fisherman he won the heart of the Emperor. The Apostles were only twelve in number, yet, nevertheless, "Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth; and their words unto the ends of the world." (Ps. 18: 5.) "And many signs and wonders were done by the Apostles in Jerusalem." (Acts 2: 43.) Peter was

the rock upon which Christ founded his Church. And however splendid and illustrious Rome may have been under the Emperors, her grandeur was as nothing in comparison with that which she displayed under the Popes.

3. Christ's doctrine is as illustrious as his Church ; it is *Catholic*, that is, universal. From the first, the Holy Scriptures were recognized as the Word of God. Whatever the Apostles and their successors decided in their councils, was accepted by all as articles of faith. Neither cruel persecutions, nor the civil wars of heretics were able to overthrow the Church. From a grain of mustard seed it grew into a tree, which "stretched forth its branches unto the sea, and its boughs unto the ends of the earth." (Ps. 79 : 12.)

Dearly beloved, are we not highly gratified in contemplating the wonderful beginning and progress of our faith and of our Church ? We believe in Christ ; consequently, we are Christians. But what will the mere name profit us if we do not fulfil all the duties of Christians ? The Jewish nation was once called the people of God, or the children of Israel, and at that time they deserved both names ; but now they deserve neither. How will it be with us if we have not deserved the name of Christians ? If the Lord should say to us also in judgment : "You are not my people, and I am not your God !" what would become of us ? My brethren ! let us fulfil all our duties ; let us regulate our lives in such a manner that the divine Judge may recognize us as Christians, not only by our name, but also by our works. Amen.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.

THE EXTERIOR AND INTERIOR GROWTH OF CHRISTIANITY.

“The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; which, indeed, is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown up, is greater than any herbs, and becometh a tree; so that the birds of the air come, and dwell in the branches thereof.” (Matt. 13: 31, 32.)

We may well ask, what does our Lord Jesus aim at in this parable? What is the object he has in view? By the grain of mustard seed, he wished to give us a lively representation of the establishment and progress of the true religion in the world. He would, also, have us understand that this grain of mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds, rises by successive increase, and becomes, at length, a tree, in which the birds of the air seek and find shelter. In like manner, Christianity, most feeble in its commencement, grew, extended by degrees throughout the world, and, finally became the religion of almost all people, figured here by “the birds of the air.” Another parable he spoke to them: “The kingdom of heaven is like to leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened.” This parable is no less instructive than the former; and as in the former Jesus intended to represent the marvelous growth and progress of religion in the world, so in the other he wished to offer us a lively figure of the happy effects it produces in the hearts of men. Let us, then, for our mutual edification make a short meditation on these two points, as they are presented to us in the parables of

- I. *The grain of mustard seed; and*
- II. *The leaven.*

I. *The wonderful progress of the religion of Christ must convince us that its establishment could be none other than the work of God, by means of the weakest instruments performing the greatest things.*

I. Consider the means Jesus Christ thought fit to employ to arrive at the end he had proposed. He himself first laid the foundation of his religion by preaching throughout Judea and Galilee; but as it was by the ministry of men that he wished to establish it in the world, he made

choice of twelve Apostles for this purpose, and having them assembled about him, he said : “ Go ye, and teach all nations ; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost ; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you ; and, behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.” (Matt. 28 : 19, 20.) Who were these heroes whom Jesus Christ chose for an undertaking so sublime, that it involved the destruction of error — the banishing of all superstition — the overturning of idols and false gods, and the conquest of men to a doctrine at variance with all their prejudices and contradictory to all their passions — a work, (in a word,) which was to entirely change the whole face of the universe ? One might naturally suppose them to be the most distinguished in Judea,—set apart from all others by birth, rank, credit, fortune, or superior talents. On the contrary, they were men without fortune, without education, without ability, without power, or authority ; twelve poor, illiterate fishermen, destitute of everything that could have given them the least ascendancy over their fellow-men. Would you then blasphemously assert that Christ’s choice was an imprudent one ; or, that the means employed by him were not in proportion to the end ? You forget that our Saviour wished the establishment of his holy religion to be attributed solely to his own power. Hence, he chose as his Apostles those who were conspicuous for their weakness, ignorance, and simplicity.

2. If to establish his religion, Jesus Christ had made choice of kings, heroes, conquerors, philosophers, men mighty in word and deed, men powerful by their credit, or celebrated for their genius and erudition, one would have supposed that the establishment of his Church was due to these accidental advantages, or was the result of a happy combination of circumstances ; but when we see twelve humble fishermen, without birth, education, or authority, and with no other weapons but the cross, make the great, the learned, the wealthy, and the wise of Rome and Greece bow down under the yoke of their divine Master, we cannot but consider their success as a real miracle, and be compelled to exclaim : Truly, “ the finger of God is here.” (Exod. 8 : 19.)

3. The Apostles, whom Jesus Christ sent to establish Christianity in the world, were absolutely incapable of doing so of themselves, and to better understand this, we have only to inquire *how he sent them*, and *who they were to whom he sent them*. When a wise and prudent king would attack and subjugate a formidable enemy, he is not satisfied with sending against him the ablest generals and the most courageous troops, but he is, moreover, solicitous to provide arms, munitions of war, and everything capable of achieving the conquest he has in view.

Now, (as we have seen, and shall still further see,) the measures which Jesus took to subdue the world to his religion, were of an entirely different character.

4. Not content with having chosen men the least suited to obtain so great a victory, he sent them without arms, having but one coat, without shoes, without staff, without purse or provisions, and commanded them to eat with those who were willing to entertain them. And where did he send them? Was it into a friendly quarter, to men disposed to favor them, or to facilitate the execution of their holy designs? No, he sent them among persons from whom they could only expect contradictions, evil treatment, and persecution, wherefore he told them expressly: "Behold, I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves. Be ye, therefore, wise as serpents, and simple as doves." (Mt. 10:16.) In other words: Behold, I send you forth as lambs in the midst of wolves, but however the fury of those wolves may rage around you, be ye always mild as lambs and simple as doves. And such, in fact, they were. Although the idolaters, whose errors and vices they attacked, broke loose upon them as savage beasts; although they were threatened, pursued, insulted, and imprisoned on every side,—yet they never opposed any other arms to the assaults of their enemies, save the meekness, simplicity, and prudence which their divine Master had recommended.

5. Yes, with those arms alone, they vanquished the strongest, they triumphed over what was most formidable; and although the lambs were torn by the cruel teeth of the wolves, they at last succeeded in changing the wolves into lambs. If Christ had employed the eloquence of orators, the wisdom of philosophers, and the power of potentates, to triumph over idolatry, error, and vice, we should have regarded the victory as the effect of these human means; but when we see that his wisdom employed for that purpose the most contemptible, the most ignorant, the most timid of men, who were even regarded at first as maniacs, and that these ignorant ones ended by convincing those who were called wise; when we see that the helpless lambs have conquered the fierce wolves, we are constrained to conclude that such a victory can only come from him who makes use of the weak things of this world to confound the strong. What is stranger still, he sent only twelve lambs to subdue a universe full of howling wolves.

II. *The kingdom of heaven is like to leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened.* You know what effect leaven has upon flour. Of itself, flour has no strength, and nothing can be made of it but an insipid food. But when it is mixed

with leaven, the composition binds it, strengthens, and prepares it to form agreeable and wholesome bread. As the leaven, then, acts upon the flour, so Christianity operates in the world. It imparts to it a secret strength that raises it above the weakness of human nature, as leaven makes the paste rise, and causes it to assume an entirely different appearance.

1. What was the world before the coming of Christ ? It was only a mass of errors, superstition, crimes, and disorders. Idolatry had blinded all minds, and evil passions corrupted all hearts. Men adored everything save the true God ; and the false deities to whom they offered incense, gave their worshippers examples of every sort of vice. Revenge, cruelty, ambition, avarice, and impurity reigned everywhere supreme and undisputed ; and the depravity was so general, that even amongst the false sages of paganism who made profession of virtue, scarcely one truly virtuous could be found.

2. How changed was all this when the salutary influence of religion penetrated to the corrupt core of the world ! Errors were dissipated, superstition vanished, disorders ceased, and virtues most sublime replaced the shameful vices that had formerly dishonored humanity. Then were seen shining forth, humility, chastity, forgiveness of injuries, renunciation of self, and love of sufferings, which had been totally unknown amongst men. The rich divided their treasure with the poor, and placed their happiness in comforting the unfortunate ; all the faithful had their interests in common, and all Christendom was as one vast family, whose members were so united by the ties of charity, that idolaters themselves were forced to exclaim : “ See how these Christians love one another ! ” Behold the admirable change that Christianity brought about in the world ! Like a bounteous river that carries abundance and fertility into all the fields it waters, this salutary religion has established the reign of morality and order in every country where it has penetrated ; it has rendered the most barbarous people, humane and gentle ; and were men wise enough to follow its principles and observe its laws, whilst rendering them virtuous, it would make them all happy.

3. What Jesus Christ did for the Jews by proposing to them these two parables, the Church does for us to-day by the Gospel of this Sunday. Let us enter, then, into the salutary views of this tender Mother, and not imitate the Jews, who, notwithstanding the touching lessons Jesus Christ constantly gave them, yet closed their ears to the truth. Your obstinacy would be more culpable than theirs, since the two parables read you from to-day’s Gospel are much clearer to

Christians, than they could possibly be to the Jews. To the latter they were simply a prophecy of the future, while to us they are a present and well-established fact, fully realized in the wonderful growth and blessed results of our holy religion.

It is given us to see the mighty Tree which had sprung from the evangelical grain of mustard seed, in whose branches the birds of the air find shelter. The Christian religion, preached by twelve ignorant men, and contemptible to all, is nevertheless established throughout the world, and people who had begun by despising and persecuting, have ended by submitting to its authority, and embracing its truths. We also see that, as the secret virtue of the leaven, changed the whole nature of the meal wherein it was hidden, so the secret strength of the Gospel, has corrected, reformed, and sanctified those to whom it has been announced, and transformed them into new men.

The saving influence of religion still makes itself felt amongst us. No men are truly virtuous save those who are truly religious. In proportion as faith is weak in our midst, morals are also corrupt,—injustice, scandals and crimes are multiplied ; and if disorder abound in any part of the world, it is because of the decay of religion in that unhappy quarter. Let us, therefore, profit by this lesson, of whose truth sad experience has thoroughly convinced us. Let us respect and love our holy religion ; and, not satisfied with being merely nominal Christians, let us accustom ourselves to think and act as real practical Christians and Catholics. Amen.

P. Y.

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE JUST.

“ Go you also into my vineyard.” (Matth. 20 : 7.)

No man is called into the vineyard of the Lord for any other purpose but to labor. Now, I ask, what are we to understand by this figure of the vineyard in to-day's Gospel? St. Bernard says: “To the wise man, his life, his mind, his conscience is his vineyard; he labors in it incessantly, and allows no weeds to grow, no spot to be uncultivated, or unoccupied.” Severe toil is needed to clear a field of noxious weeds; but still greater labor is necessary to clear the conscience from all, even the smallest stain of sin, and to keep it always pure. Yet he who does this, enjoys the wine of interior joy in God, as the fruit of his toil, and of him, it is written: “Thou shalt eat the labors of thy hands: blessed art thou, and it shall be well with thee.” (Ps. 127 : 2.) To-day, I shall represent to you the soul of the just man as a spiritual vineyard: “Go you also into my vineyard.” You will see that a just man is very industrious. His thoughts, words, and actions sufficiently show that

- I. *His virtue resembles the vine;*
- II. *His tongue resembles the wine-press; and*
- III. *His actions resemble the branches.*

I. A good vine must have

- 1. *A good soil; and*
- 2. *A living stem.*

The virtue of the just has both these conditions.

I. “I planted thee a golden vineyard, all true seed,” says our heavenly Father to the just man. (Jerem. 2 : 21.) Nothing is wanting in the soil. Now the just man must cultivate this soil most carefully, so that the enemy of man may not sow weeds in it. He must plant in his heart the good seed of doctrine, as the first foundation of perfection, “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts” (Matth. 15 : 19.);

while, on the other hand, "the law of his God is in his (the good Christian's) heart." (Ps. 36 : 31.) He will always fix it upon heavenly objects, so that it may not be dazzled, or led astray by earthly affections.

2. The moisture of the soil must give life to the vine. "The just man liveth by faith." (Rom. 1 : 17.) Through faith he becomes a member, or, so to say, a branch of him who said of himself: "I am the vine; you are the branches;" (John 15 : 5.) "I am the life." (John 11 : 25.) For this reason St. Paul writes: "I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me," (Gal. 2 : 20) through faith, through grace, through good works.

II. The wine-press separates the juice from the pulp, it

1. *Yields the good; and*
2. *Keeps back the evil.*

Thus, also, does the tongue of the just man act.

1. "The mouth of the just shall meditate wisdom; and his tongue shall speak judgment." (Ps. 36 : 30.) When he begins to speak, he first calls upon God: "O Lord, thou wilt open my lips." (Ps. 50 : 17.) He will not even begin the praise of God without divine assistance. "The lips of the just teach many," (Prov. 10 : 21); and he never opens them without having God's honor, or his neighbor's salvation in view. When he is insulted, he may say: "I became as a man that heareth not, and that hath no reproofs in his mouth." (Ps. 37 : 15.)

2. Further, "let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile." (1 Pet. 3 : 10.) "He is far from the wickedness of those who with deceitful lips, and with a double heart, have spoken;" who boast: "We will magnify our tongue; our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?" (Ps. 11 : 3-5.) The just man supplicates God: "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; and a door round about my lips. Incline not my heart to evil words." (Ps. 140 : 3-4.) The purity of his words indicates the uprightness of his heart: for, "if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." (James 3 : 2.)

III. Good branches produce

1. *Good fruit; and*
2. *Abundant fruit.*

The works of the just man correspond to these dispositions.

1. The just man lives through faith, though no other than that which works through love. He frequently examines and tests his actions to see if they are really *good*. "Let us see if the vineyard flourish, if the flowers be ready to bring forth fruits." (Cant. 7 : 12.) "My vineyard is before me," (Cant. 8 : 12) says he ; and he adds : "Catch us the little foxes that destroy the vines," (Cant. 2 : 15); that is, endeavor to avoid even the smallest imperfection that could displease the Lord of the vineyard.

2. The abundant fruit of the vine, symbolizes the multitude of the good Christian's virtues. "The fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, mildness, faith, modesty, continency, chastity." (Gal. 5 : 22, 23.) The fruits of all these virtues are to be seen in the just man's actions, whenever he has the opportunity of practising them. It may be said of him what is written by the royal prophet : "He shall be like a tree which is planted near the running waters, which shall bring forth its fruit, in due season. And his leaf shall not fall off : and all whatsoever he shall do shall prosper." (Ps. 1 : 3.)

Thus the vineyard, that is the soul or conscience of the just man, appears. "I passed by the field of the slothful man, and by the vineyard of the foolish man ; and behold, it was all filled with nettles ; and thorns had covered the face thereof." (Prov. 24 : 30, 31.) Should such a place be called a vineyard ? exclaims St. Bernard : it was a vineyard once, but it is such no longer : it is a desert. Where is the vine of virtue ? Where are the branches of good works ? Where is the wine of spiritual joy ? The sinner has neglected the vineyard which the Lord planted, so that it no longer resembles a vineyard. Ye fools ! "Why stand ye here all the day idle ?" (Matth. 20 : 6.) You cannot say : "because no man hath hired us." Ye blind ! you are already hired ; "You are bought with a great price," (1 Cor. 6 : 20) that is, with the precious blood of your Saviour. Oh, labor then ! "for the night cometh, wherein no man can work." Call to mind often what our Saviour has said : "I am the vine ; you are the branches : he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit : for without me you can do nothing. If any one remaineth not in me, he shall be cast forth as a branch, and shall wither, and they shall gather him up, and cast him into the fire ; and he burneth." (John 15 : 5, 6.). B.

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

THE CALLS OF GOD TO HIS CREATURES.

“The kingdom of heaven is like to a master of a family who went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard.” (Matt. 20: 1.)

The Gospel of Septuagesima Sunday is one of the most profound and comprehensive of the ecclesiastical year. The whole history of man, the history of the kingdom of God upon earth, from the first day in which the Lord created the universe and went forth to hire laborers into his vineyard, down to the last, to the evening of the world, when he will come to judge the living and the dead, and to reward each one according to his works,—all this, my brethren, is delineated in the brief but striking epitome which constitutes the parable of this Sunday, and these words, moreover, are well calculated to stir up in us an earnest spirit of penance. Therefore, we will consider to-day :

I *The various calls of the Lord to mankind in the course of time;* and
II. *What thoughts these calls of God must awaken in our souls.*

I. *“The master of a family went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.”*

I. Early in the morning the Almighty went forth to create the world, the heavens and the earth. He made Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, and placed them in Paradise, in a garden of delights, in order to cultivate and take care of it. Mankind was to remain obedient and faithful to the divine will and commands, until the great day of life was passed, when God agreed to give them the promised reward of everlasting happiness—God repeats this, his first going forth, *at the birth of every human being.* In the early morning of our life, he graciously draws near to us. He raises us through the holy Sacrament of Baptism to a higher, supernatural life, and fills us with his holy Spirit. He calls us through the first impressions of a pious Christian education, through the salutary instructions of our parents, teachers, pastors, and confessors, urging us to remain faithful to him from the very beginning of our lives, and to cultivate the garden of our hearts (that other vineyard of God), preserving it from the blighting influence of evil.

2. *The Master of the family went forth for a second time into the world.* Those who were first called by God, in the wickedness of their hearts, refused him their service and obedience. They fell away from their God, and his holy spirit departed from them. "My spirit," says the Bible, "shall not remain in man forever, because he is flesh." (Gen. 6: 3.) Men became carnal, and the Spirit of God could no longer dwell with them. "God seeing that the wickedness of men was great on the earth, and that all the thought of their heart was bent upon evil at all times," (Gen. 6: 45) after the first thousand years, went forth for the second time ; at the third hour, as it were, he went forth in order to hire laborers into his vineyard. He destroyed by the Deluge those first inhabitants of the earth, those giants of old, and chose *Noah* as the progenitor of a new and better race. He made with him a special covenant more gracious than that which he had concluded with his predecessors. As a perpetual sign of this covenant, he placed his bow in the heavens to shine before all future generations as a memorial of his second going forth in order to hire laborers into his vineyard.

In the third hour of *our* lives did not the Lord also go forth the second time to engage us as laborers in his vineyard ? In our rash and impetuous youth, when the gracious impressions of earlier days are lost or forgotten ; when our natural concupiscence is generally quickened, and all our thoughts are bent upon evil—the Lord goes forth a second time to warn us, and call us again to his service. In youth, when man, in the arrogance of his heart, woos the children of the world, like those giants of old, and imitates them in sin and wickedness—the Lord going forth for the second time, approaches them with the greatest graces, in order to save them from ruin. He approaches us with the grace of holy Confirmation ; and, in the anointing of holy Chrism, he places upon our brows the sign of that great covenant which binds us to him as faithful laborers, during the remainder of our life. He comes to us in those perilous years with the grace of absolution ; and he enters into the depths of our souls in the most holy Sacrament of the Altar, to seal and confirm the blessed covenant of his mercy.

3. *At the sixth and at the ninth hours, the Lord went forth for the third and fourth times,* saying to those whom he found idle : "Go you also into my vineyard." Another thousand years, the third epoch in the history of the world, had passed like a courier in flying haste. A thousand years are as a single day before God, and as the stream of time rolls rapidly into the bosom of eternity, men again forgot their God, as they had done from the beginning. All their time and affections were given up to temporal affairs. Sunk in luxury and wantonness, in the pride of their sinful hearts, they began to turn away

wholly from their Creator. But, before they were driven by want to seek new dwelling places in strange lands, they wished to erect a proud monument of their earthly sinful endeavors. They built a mighty tower in order to have a visible centre upon the earth, a rallying point, so to speak, for their race, and for their worldly ambition. But God desired to be the spiritual centre of his creatures ; and that their eyes should not be directed to the work of their own hands but be raised up above these mundane things even to the highest heavens. And God descended from those celestial heights, and confounded their speech. (Gen. 11 : 6-8.)

The eyes of men, however, remained fixed upon the earth. Separated from God, they could not help being immersed in sins and vices. At last, they sank so deep in iniquity and forgetfulness of God, that they paid divine honors to the stars and to images made by their own hands ; they cast themselves down in worship before men and beasts, and even adored the corrupt deities of their own foul sins and vices. Thus the thirtieth century in the world's history, with its overwhelming weight of woe and evil, sank into the stream of time : and the thirty-first began its dark existence. Far from God, given over to earthly desires, and hardened in the most abominable vices and crimes, mankind wandered forlorn in the broad road that leadeth to destruction.

4. Then it was that the master of the family went forth again at the sixth hour ; then it was that God made a new covenant *with Abraham* the Just, so that, through him, the precious and fast-expiring sparks of the worship of the true God and of the hope of a Redeemer might be kept alive. He took him from his nation and from his father's house, to found in him the progenitor of a new race, the chosen people of God. In him, were all the generations of mankind to be blessed ; and at the appointed time, the grace of redemption was destined to descend upon all nations through his offspring, as through a holy channel. That his people might not forget this third going forth of their God, and might always remember the covenant of mercy made with Abraham, the Lord, in the rite of Circumcision, cut the sign of that covenant in their very flesh.

5. At the ninth hour, he went forth again and called *Moses*, his servant. He sent the Prophets to remind his people continually of his merciful promises, and of their high vocation ; and when, in spite of all, they forsook him and despised his benefits, he strove to recall them to their duty, at one time by the most extraordinary manifestations of love and kindness, and again by severity and rigorous chastisements.

If we consider the going forth of the Lord at the sixth and ninth hours, those merciful efforts of the great Master of the human family

which extended through two thousand years of the world's existence, do we not find, my brethren, these same goings forth represented also, in our lives? What are the sixth and ninth hours in which the Lord repeatedly goes forth to call us, as laborers, into his vineyard? Contemplate the vision of your lives, that important period extending from youth to middle age and on into old age; consider those years in which man, being burdened with earthly cares, sinks into complete forgetfulness of God and of his soul's salvation; those many long years of middle life—do they not resemble those ancient years beginning with the call of Abraham and including the history of the people of Israel down to the end of the fortieth century of the world? Does not the Lord in these long years, as in the sixth and in the ninth hours, appear repeatedly to warn and to remind us of the great mission which he so earnestly desires us to accomplish? Does he not earnestly call upon his creatures to come and devote to his service, those precious years of life which remain for them? Does he not, again and again, offer them his choicest graces, calling them forth, as he did Abraham and the whole Jewish people, from their nation, their homes, and their abiding place in an unbelieving and sinful life, making them by his covenant of mercy the progenitors of a new race, the chosen children of God? Does he not often and plainly speak to them as he once spoke to the Jews, by alternate acts of kindness and severity, threats and caresses, and by the solemn warnings of the Prophets re-echoed by the voice of his Church? O that we had heeded his gracious calls during those past years! O that we were now laboring faithfully in his vineyard, looking joyfully forward to the close of the long day of life, for our great recompense—the infinite treasures of the kingdom of God!

6. *“About the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing: and he saith to them: Why stand you here all the day idle? They say to him? Because no man hath hired us. He saith to them: Go you also into my vineyard.”* What is this last going forth of the Master of the family at the eleventh hour, but the coming of the Incarnate God upon the earth, in order to call mankind for the last time, and engage laborers for his vineyard? “God having spoken on divers occasions, and many ways, in times past, to the fathers by the prophets: last of all, in these days, hath spoken to us by his Son.” (Hebr. 1: 1, 2.)

7. The Prophets had spoken in vain. Mankind continued to sink deeper and deeper into the slough of vice and iniquity. Millions stood idle, for there was none to guide or assist them in working out their salvation. The Gentiles could truly say: “No man hath hired us.” They were lying idle on the highways of life, far from God and

estranged from him and his kingdom, buried deeply in the mire of error and superstition. With untiring mercy towards his obstinate and wayward creatures, the Lord arose for the last time to fulfill his promises, and called the Gentile world into his vineyard. All mankind were thus privileged to spend, at least, the last hours of the day in his service and to receive in the great evening of the world's history the promised penny of everlasting life.

Thus, also, God goes forth in the evening of every life, for the last time, to call to himself that poor soul that is satiated and wearied with its miserable existence. He speaks to it in plain words ; he makes clear to it the transitory and empty nature of all earthly things ; and he draws near to it with the consolations of his greatest graces, so that, absolved and strengthened by the holy Sacraments of Viaticum and Extreme Unction, the departing spirit may follow him, at last, into his celestial vineyard. Alas, in that solemn hour will be fulfilled with many men the words of the Lord, when he lamented over the prevarication of all mankind, and cried out by the voice of his prophet : " All the day long have I spread forth my hands to a people that believeth not, and contradicteth me "—! (Rom. 10: 21.)

II. Casting a glance over those great epochs of the world in which, from time to time, God went forth to call men into his vineyard, and contrasting with them the different periods of human life at which God in his mercy calls us to his service, I imagine I hear a supernatural voice resounding loud and strong from the abyss of by-gone centuries and enunciating these three grand watch-words :

1. *God is merciful at all times :*
2. *Work diligently in the vineyard of the Lord, whenever he calls you to his service ; and*
3. *Take courage and enter, even though, perhaps, you have been late in following the call of the divine Master.*

1. The infinite and incomprehensible mercy of God is illustrated in an admirable manner in the beautiful parable of to-day's Gospel. The master of a family goes out early in the morning, to hire laborers into his vineyard ; he goes out at the third hour, and again, at the sixth and ninth hours. Nay, he goes out once more at the eleventh hour, and calls all who are standing idle into his vineyard, in order to give to them the penny of everlasting life. Does not every later going-forth call out more loudly than the preceding one : " Thy mercy is magnified even to the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds " (Ps. 56: 11)? Or, when God with even richer and more abundant clemency, calls his creatures, in the fullness of time, revealing to them his inmost

being, and sending down his only begotten Son upon the earth ; when the Son of God wanders wearily though the rough valleys of this lower sphere sinking, at last, under the cruel weight of that Cross, on which he was to consummate the redemption of the world, do not his infinite love and self-sacrifice proclaim yet more loudly and emphatically : “ Thy mercy is magnified even to the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds ”—? It would have been love and mercy if the Lord had only established his great Vineyard, and called mankind therein, in the beginning of time ; promising them the penny of his heavenly reward. If he had gone forth but once for that divine purpose, we would have had abundant reason to praise him and his mercy everlasting with the stars of heaven and to rejoice forever with the sons of God. But the Lord went forth repeatedly, and, with never-failing endurance, called to his service the successors of the unhappy people who had despised his earlier calls.

2. Should not we who have been called at the eleventh hour to receive the overflowing stream of the grace of God through Jesus Christ, praise his great mercy towards us ? Look back upon the millions and millions of human lives falling like drops of water into the bosom of the earth, and returning no more ;—look back upon the countless children of men who have wandered over the face of the globe since the days of Adam, of Noah, of Abraham, and of the Prophets, and question these hosts, passing before our eyes like the shifting sands of the desert, if they can boast of as great grace and mercy as *we* have received. They all desired and hoped to see the day of Christ ; that the gracious sun of Redemption might shine upon them and bring them to everlasting life and happiness. Behold among them the noblest spirits, the brightest and best of the heathen world, the most faithful and devout of the Jewish people. They stand before us in grief,—yea, in a sort of holy despair,—with eyes inclined to the earth, weighed down by the burden of sin which thousands of years have heaped upon their shoulders ; and if they raise their eyes to heaven, they see only the barred gates and the closed entrance to Paradise, or the dark and joyless Limbo which awaited the just before the atonement of Christ. Without any merit on our part, the Lord has called us in the clear, bright day of Redemption into his heavenly kingdom. We may drink to the full from that stream of blessings which was a sealed fountain for thousands of years. Must we not in the great gratitude of our hearts cry out with the royal Psalmist : “ The mercies of the Lord will I sing forever ” (Ps. 88: 2.)?

3. Look into your own life, and ponder upon the calls to his vineyard with which the Lord has so often favored you. Number all the

admonitions of the grace of God which he has, in a manner, squandered on you—how he called you in the innocence of childhood,—how he drew near you for the second and third times in your youth ; how he repeatedly approached you in the sixth and ninth hours, and now, perhaps, even at the eleventh hour how he once more calls your soul to his service—are you not bound with special gratitude to proclaim and praise the mercy of the Lord ? It would be a beautiful and profitable sight if we could look down into the soul of every human being and there contemplate how the Lord draws most lovingly and mercifully near to every soul in the various seasons and hours of life. Above, in the life of eternity, where we shall no more see as through a glass darkly, but face to face, the visitations of God for the salvation of our souls will stand forth before our eyes clearly and visibly, and will fill us with everlasting gratitude. For your own part, the various calls of the divine Master, all cry out to you if you will but hearken to their eloquent accents : “ Work in the vineyard of the Lord at whatever hour he has called upon you, and the reward which he, in the evening, will distribute among his chosen ones will, likewise, be yours ! ”

(a) Our call to the celestial Vineyard, and the penny of reward which is promised us, are certainly a pure gift from the mercy of God. “ So then it is not of him that willetteth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy,” (Rom. 9 : 16,) to make men, one day, partakers of the heavenly glory. But it requires faithful and untiring labor on our side if the decrees of God’s mercy shall be fulfilled in our regard. “ For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his Angels : and then will he render to every man according to his works.” (Matt. 16 : 27.) “ Many are called, but few are chosen,” says the Lord to us in the Gospel of this day. “ Therefore, . . . be ye steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the works of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Cor. 15 : 58.) Without the grace of God we can not be saved ; neither shall we reach eternal bliss unless we co-operate with that grace.

(b) It is then with good reason that our Lord compares the service which he demands from each one of us with the labor which a master requires in his vineyard. The vine exacts from its owner the utmost care and persistent labor. But if the extraordinary care of the vine-dresser be not assisted by the warm rays of the sun and a season of propitious weather, all his labor and trouble are fruitless. The Lord expects from us Christians a most careful and laborious assiduity in his service. Our Blessed Lord calls the kingdom of heaven a costly pearl, so as to represent to us the trouble we must take to procure it ! Pearls are not found upon the roads, or lying about in profusion, so that they can be picked up without any effort or trouble. The pearl-fisher embarks in a small boat upon dangerous waters ; and the diver

descends to the bottom of the sea in order to bring forth the precious gem. Our Saviour calls the kingdom of heaven a precious treasure, in order to show us that as we must dig into the bowels of the earth with much labor and sweat to lay hold of its gold and silver, so we must suffer and toil in his service if we would bring up from the depths of our souls, the priceless treasures of eternal life.

(c) All whom the master of the family called at different times (according to the words of the Gospel) accepted, without delay, his gracious invitation. No one turned back from the gates of the vineyard ; and no one stopped working after having once entered therein. All labored uninterruptedly until evening, when the Lord of the vineyard said to his steward : “Call the laborers and pay them their hire, beginning from the last even to the first.” They all received the same wages—the penny which he had promised them ; those who had labored only one hour, and those who had borne the burden and the heat of the day. This fact recorded (in the Gospel) of the lord of the vineyard was not intended to imply that it was a matter of indifference to him how many hours in the day a laborer had worked for him, or how faithful or how careless he had shown himself in his work ; but he (the Saviour) meant, on that occasion, to teach the Pharisees this great truth : *That all men have a common claim upon the reward of eternal happiness.* Those haughty Pharisees believed that, as the descendants of the chosen people of God, they had a much greater right to the everlasting joys of heaven, than the other nations, which he afterwards called into his kingdom.

(d) In whatever hour the Lord sends forth the calls of his grace to us, whether it be in the middle, or in the beginning, of our lives, let us correspond to it immediately and work unceasingly, like all those whom the master of the Gospel called into his vineyard ; so that we may receive not merely the penny of salvation, but the richest joys and the highest degree of glory, as the reward of our labors. Let us toil unintermittingly at our task until the night of Death descends upon us ; so that the Lord may not say to us, as he did to the Jews of old : “The publicans and the harlots shall go into the kingdom of God before you.” (Matt. 21 : 31.)

(e) Take courage, aged man, venerable woman, take courage though, perhaps, you have been late in following the call of God. There is comfort for all in the words of our Gospel : “The last shall be first, and the first last.” Or, says the Lord : “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will ? Is thine eye evil because I am good ?” (Matt. 20 : 15.) “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy.” (Rom. 9 : 15.) “And therefore, have I raised thee, that I may show my power in thee, and my name may be spoken of throughout all the earth.” (Exod. 9 : 16.) *Our salvation will*

always be the work of grace and of our own co-operation. Every moment of our lives which is sanctified by the grace of God, bears in itself the prize of everlasting happiness in heaven. Every human work performed through divine grace, has a claim to the promised reward. It is, therefore, *never too late* to enter upon the service of God, or to work in his holy vineyard. When the grace of God and his mercy begin to shine upon the sinner, then will the darkness of the blackest night be changed into the brightest day. While no one has a right to everlasting bliss, yet can we, at all times, build our hopes of salvation upon the all-powerful grace of God. That, alone, can give us—when and where it pleases—the reward of eternal life.

Do we not see in the history of those Saints whom the Lord called late in life, how through their great love, and through their fiery zeal, the last have become first? St. Paul was called by Christ after he had persecuted the Church and was “yet breathing out the threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord,” yet of his faithful co-operation with grace, he cries out: “By the grace of God, I am what I am: and his grace in me hath not been void, but I have labored more than all,”—meaning the other Apostles. (1 Cor. 15:10.) St. Mary Magdalen (and with her, thousands of penitent souls), received at a still later hour, the divine call of repentance,—nevertheless, the Lord hath said of her: “Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much.” (Luke 7:47.) Has not the Christian era, the eleventh and last hour of the world’s history, done more for the spread of the kingdom of truth and virtue than all the earlier periods? Is not the whole history of Christianity,—are not all of us who were called from among the Gentiles, shining proofs of the words of our Lord: “The last shall be first, and the first last?”

“*Go thou, also, into my vineyard,*”—thus the Lord says to every human soul, as, in his various goings forth from the throne of his glory, he walks throughout the world. But who could believe, or comprehend, that God will vouchsafe to call for the second and third time the man who has despised and rejected his first invitation? Who could believe it, and sin against the divine mercy? Ah! no, my dearly beloved, entering with holy earnestness and in a penitential spirit upon this sacred season of Lent,—let us attend to the voice of God, let us promptly respond to the merciful and maternal invitation of his holy Church, to the end that we may not merely be reckoned among the many called, but also,—praise to the infinite mercy of God!—among the blessed few chosen! Amen.

BISHOP EHRLER.

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

THE MISERABLE CONDITION OF THE OBSTINATE SINNER.

“And some (seed) fell upon a rock, and, as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it had no moisture.” (Luke 8: 6.)

As our Saviour looked about upon the people who came in crowds to hear him preach, he clearly beheld at the same time the secret dispositions of their hearts. He was well aware that although many came with a good intention, the majority were actuated by curiosity or other unworthy motives. Consequently, on this occasion, he compared the word of God to seed, which, according to the nature of the soil into which it falls, either produces fruit, or withers away without any good results. An important lesson, especially for those of whom it is written: “Your hearts shall become like stone,” that is, for the obdurate and impenitent sinner, who easily

- I. *Forgets the past;*
- II. *Neglects the present; and*
- III. *Thinks not of the future.*

Such a soul as described by St. Bernard, fears neither God nor man; and if any such are here present to-day, I wish to place their dangerous condition before their eyes.

- I. The evil-doer easily forgets,

 1. *The sins which he has committed; and*
 2. *The insults which he has offered thereby to God.*

1. As the just man “goes from virtue to virtue,” (Ps. 83: 8) while journeying upward along the path of salvation, the sinner, on the contrary, falls from one sin into another on his perilous downward course. In the beginning, he walks in the counsel of the ungodly, afterwards he stands in the way of sinners, and in the end, he sits in the chair of pestilence. (Ps. 1: 1.) He is deserted by God, and given over to himself. What follows? His heart becomes hard, and he goes to the extremes of wickedness. Seeking only to gratify his evil passions, he drinks iniquity like water, he commits sins without shame, and forgets them as easily as he has committed them. He must acknowledge that: “Evils without number have surrounded me; my

iniquities have overtaken me, and I was not able to see. They are multiplied above the hairs of my head." (Ps. 39 : 13.)

2. And, nevertheless, he thinks neither of the number, nor of the magnitude of his transgressions. He tramples under foot the precious blood of Christ, which was shed to ransom his soul. He wishes to forget that, by every sin which he commits, he renews the sufferings of Christ, and that he is among those spoken of by the Apostle as, "crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, and making a mockery of him." (Hebr. 6 : 6.) St. Ambrose thus expresses his astonishment at the obduracy of the Jews: "O, ye Jewish hearts, harder than any stone ! The rocks were rent, but your hearts were hardened ! The whole world was shaken, but your hearts remained unmoved !" Wicked, obdurate, impenitent sinner ! compare your heart with the hearts of the Jews ! Consider what is meant by these words: *To crucify Christ again—again—again !*

The sinner continues to sin, despising :

1. *The manifest punishments of God ; and*
2. *The advice of his Pastor or Confessor.*

1. One may see a sad example of obduracy in the person of the hard-hearted Pharao. All the divine punishments, all the wonderful miracles performed by Moses, were not able to soften his hard heart. He is a true figure of the impenitent sinner. He will not acknowledge that he has any share in causing those calamities which desolate the land, such as war, famine, tempests. The manifold evils which oppress him, he ascribes to his unlucky fate, rather than to his sins. If he still possess any spark of religion, however, he is forced, against his will, to condemn himself. His sins are too many and grievous for him to deceive his conscience with the thought of peace. "He seeketh rest, and findeth none." (Matth. 12 : 43.) He is constantly tormented by the gnawing worm of conscience, which is the fore-runner of his eternal condemnation. He carries his punishment around with him, although he still refuses to openly confess that it is the result of the just judgments of God.

2. The instructions of his Pastor, or Confessor, fall upon his hardened soul as the good seeds falls upon a rock. He listens to them, but he will hear nothing of reformation. We read of King Herod, that he listened very willingly to St. John the Baptist. "He heard him willingly," (Mark 6 : 20,) but when it came to the point of giving up the object of his guilty passions, he prepared to deprive the prophet of his life, rather than put away Herodias. In no other place do we read

of our Saviour using these words of to-day's Gospel, wherein he cried out : "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." (Luke 8 : 8.) He foresaw that there would arise people like those described by King David, " who having eyes, see not : and having ears, hear not." (Ps. 113 : 5.) These are the obdurate sinners. For, as no medicine is of any avail to him who suffers from an incurable disease, so, also, no advice is of use to the obdurate sinner. His ears are as those of the dead, who can no longer hear. He derives no benefit from all the warnings which are given him, not because he can not, but because he will not hear.

III. Finally, the sinner thinks neither,

1. *Of heaven* ; nor
2. *Of hell*.

I should rather say, he thinks not seriously of them. His thoughts are : "The heaven of heaven is the Lord's : but the earth he hath given to the children of men." (Ps. 113 : 16.) He is so much absorbed in temporal goods and pleasures, that he would be satisfied if he might enjoy them forever. O shame ! O folly ! He sees his miserable condition, but he will not arise from it. "They will not set their thoughts to return to their God." (Osea 5 : 4.) Let us consider the true meaning of these words. The prophet does not say : They will not return; but, "They will not *set their thoughts to return*."

2. He suffers the pains of hell in anticipation, and secretly feels the never-dying worm of conscience. There is no alleviation for his pains ; but he tries, as far as possible, to put them out of his mind. "Come," he exclaims, "let us enjoy the good things that are present, and let us speedily use the creatures as in youth. * * * Let us crown ourselves with roses, before they be withered." (Wis. 2 : 6.) Not unfrequently, his evil passions cause the obdurate sinner to rush into infidelity, making him doubt if there is a hell ; or he feeds himself with the false hope of doing penance at the close of his life. What a miserable condition !

Beloved Christians ! Is this picture of an obdurate heart over-drawn ? I tremble lest there should be some among you whose consciences give evidence that they are in this wretched state. "To-day if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts." (Ps. 94 : 8.) Let not the word of God fall upon a rock, lest the words of St. Paul be fulfilled : "According to thy hardness, and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up to thyself wrath, against the day of wrath, and revelation of the just judgment of God." (Rom. 2 : 5.)

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY.

THE OBSTACLES WHICH SLOTHFUL HEARTS PRESENT TO THE WORD OF GOD.

“But that on the good ground are they who in a good and perfect heart, hearing the word, keep it and bring forth fruit in patience. (Luke 8:15.)

According to the words of to-day's Gospel, my dear brethren, there is a vast difference between an earthly sower of seed and his heavenly prototype. Before the former goes forth to scatter seed in his field, he first enriches the soil with manure, and prepares it most carefully with the plough and the harrow. Then, he proceeds to cast the precious grains sparingly into the well-prepared ground. But the heavenly Sower acts differently. Going forth, he casts his seed prodigally upon good soil, upon the wayside, upon stony ground, and among thorns. He does not first prepare the soil to receive it. Humanly speaking, it does not seem to concern him, if even the greater part of it is wasted.

After God had drawn the world out of nothing by his almighty fiat, after he had made the heavens and the earth, he went forth innumerable times in the spring, the summer, and the autumn of the long life of the world, in order to cast forth upon it most prodigally the seed of his holy word. Seven times and more, did he, in the beginning of creation, launch his omnipotent fiat into the realms of space, and every new decree called forth fresh forms of beautiful and varied existence. He cast his word into the clay of a human body which he had formed from the slime of the earth, and through that fiat, the first man, Adam, awoke to active, breathing life. Nay, more, by that almighty word of the Creator a higher, supernatural life was infused into the image formed from the dust of the earth. The word of the Lord was made known in rich abundance to the ancient Patriarchs and Prophets. It spread itself even to the farthest limits of the earth and to the utmost boundaries thereof; and it spoke to the heathen nations in manifold ways. At last, in the fulness of time, the Divine “Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.” (John 1:14.) In an excess of love for sinful men our Lord Jesus Christ quitted the bosom of his eternal Father, and appeared upon earth in human form: “Like unto ourselves in all things save in sin.”

Behold, the heavenly Husbandman who came to scatter his seed abundantly upon the wayside—upon the good and perfect soil, as well

as upon stony ground, and among thorns ! He spoke to the believing, and to those in whom his all-seeing eye already discerned the fact that his word would be fruitless. Is it not he, the Divine Sower, who had spoken such powerful and convincing words by the mouths of his Apostles, and who scatters his seed so prodigally, to-day, from our innumerable Catholic pulpits ? At no time of the year, does the Church cease to cast that holy seed into the hearts of her children ; and if we did not place obstacles in the way, we would daily receive the greatest blessings thereby.

To the end that the word of God may now produce abundant fruits for us, dear Christians, yea, even to the measure of sixty or a hundred fold, I propose to consider our *Slothfulness* as the chief obstacle to the growth of the divine seed, and, therefore, I will speak to you to-day

- I. *Of our Slothfulness in hearing ;*
- II. *Of our Slothfulness in retaining ; and*
- III. *Of our Slothfulness in profiting by the word of God.*

I. If the word of God were received everywhere, with good and perfect hearts ; if its sacred germ were permitted to unfold itself at all times free from all human obstacles—who could ever adequately describe the benefits which would thereby abound in the world ? O far more glorious and admirable than the face of Nature smiling before our eyes in all the blushing loveliness of springtime, far more radiant and beautiful than the ripened charms of summer, would the spiritual world appear, if men did but fulfil, in this respect, the will of God and the end of their creation ! When formerly St. Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, first spake to the Jews at Pentecost, and preached to them the Gospel of Jesus Christ, three thousand men as with one voice, cried out : “ What shall we do, men, brethren ? ” (Acts 2:37.) A new life was awakened in them. Like the vivifying breath of Spring, the word of the Apostles was carried over the whole world, and wherever it was wafted, millions of converts asked the same joyful question : “ ‘What shall we do ?’ What must we do in order to be saved ? ” The face of the earth was changed ; the night of unbelief, with all its darksome shades, disappeared, and under the light of the Sun of Justice, the blossoms and fruits of holiness showed themselves in every quarter of the globe.

i. Does not history tell us of the wonderful effects produced by the word of God when it was embraced, in former times, by good and perfect hearts ? When St. John Chrysostom preached of old, the people at Antioch quitted the circus and the theatre, in order to listen to

him. Often, as many as eighty thousand men listened to the great missionary, St. Vincent Ferrer, and they listened, moreover, with weeping and sobbing. When St. John Capistran came to Germany in the fifteenth century, to encourage the true believers and strengthen them in their faith, whole cities went forth to meet him, and to strew flowers in his path. One single sermon of that famous preacher brought back twelve thousand men to the true faith ! He was frequently obliged to pause on account of the sighs and sobs of his listeners. The Hussites in Bohemia were accustomed to declare that *they were more afraid of this one monk than of an army of thirty thousand men !*

2. You may tell me, that those were extraordinary times, that those were extraordinary graces wherewith the Lord accompanied the preaching of the word. Chrysostom, Vincent Ferrer, and Capistran, were all, (you say), extraordinary preachers, the lights of the ages in which they lived. Granted that extraordinary circumstances contributed to the grand and stupendous results. Granted, also, that modern preachers of the Gospel are often to blame if the word of God does not bring forth its proper and abundant fruit. But is not the word of God always the same ? Is it not the true, gracious, all-powerful doctrine of the Lord, which is announced to us under all circumstances, faithfully preached to us by the mouth of every Catholic priest ? Slothfulness, slothfulness in hearing the word of God—*this* it is, dear Christians, which is the chief obstacle to its free and full operation.

3. Go abroad into all the cities and churches of the land, and there, in the first place, count those who listen to the sermon with the intention and desire to profit by it ; afterwards, comparing their number with those who neglect to hear it altogether, or who listen to it with indifference ; and you will soon discover that they form an insignificant minority. How many thousands are there who, after leaving school, seldom or never hear the word of God ! Is it not slothfulness in hearing the divine word which places the greatest obstacles to its efficacy ?

4. Consider the lives of the majority of men, and listen to the excuses which they plead in order to free themselves from the obligation of hearing the word of God ! To a part of them, life is a play ; especially if the Lord has placed them in so-called comfortable circumstances. As children sport with games and idle toys, so these frivolous creatures play with money, and earthly goods. They play with the scepters and crowns of the earth. They play with the honors and joys of the world. They play with women, and with the souls of men. In

unworthy trifling, they waste the days and years of their lives. Or they form to themselves false ideas of science and knowledge, in the pursuit of which, they consume their strength and usefulness, and waste the talents given them for a better purpose. None of these have any desire to hear the word of God. They have no higher aim in life than their follies and frivolities, they devote their energies to no better task than the amassing of riches and the pursuit of sensual pleasures. They will presumptuously assure you if you urge them to attend a sermon, that they already know what the preacher will say. The doctrine of Christ Crucified, announced to them by the voice of his minister, is too sublime, too severe for them ; or the elocution of the preacher, his voice or, perchance, his gestures, do not please them. “ For there shall be a time when they will not bear sound doctrine ; but according to their own desires they will heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears ; and will turn away indeed their hearing from the truth, and will be turned to fables.” (2 Tim. 4: 3.) Slothfulness of spirit robs such men of all conception and love of the ennobling truths of Faith.

5. For the great majority of men, however, life, far from being a game or a sportive play, is, on the contrary, a ceaseless struggle, a chain of sorrows and labors which ends only with the grave. The burden of family cares, the oppressive exactions of public offices and honors, business worries, money-troubles, law-suits, and speculations, the thousand and one anxieties of our actual existence, all these are the links of the heavy chain which fetter and weigh down the souls of men. They have not even time to hear Mass, or to say their daily prayers, much less attend to the preaching of the word of God. They make no effort to sanctify and sweeten their cares and labors by listening to sermons, or piously meditating thereon, and hence, deprived of help from a higher and holier source, robbed of the graces and blessings of heaven—life becomes to them, indeed, a veritable torment, without profit and without reward.

The sinner, also, avoids the hearing of the word of God, lest he be disturbed by its admonitions, or compelled by its influence to do penance for his sins. He resembles Herod, who, at first, revered and protected St. John the Baptist as a holy and just man, and willingly listened to him ; but afterwards, becoming hardened in vice, and indignant at St. John’s rebuke, avoided the latter, and permitted him to be imprisoned and, finally, beheaded.

6. Many who, in their days of innocence, listened to the word of God with attention and devotion, now, confirmed in iniquity, gnash their teeth at the teachers of truth as the high priests did when St. Stephen

addressed to them words which were hard and bitter to their corrupt, hypocritical hearts. "These priests who reproach us and would compel us to listen to them," say they, "should first reform themselves!" O hypocrites! who perceive the mote in the eye of your neighbor, but not the beam in your own! Hypocrites who know very well, that if you do not wish to imitate our works, you should, at least, act according to our words!

"He that is of God heareth the words of God. Therefore, you hear them not, because you are not of God," (John 8: 47,) thus speaks the Lord to all those, who because of slothfulness despise his word. "But if thou wilt not hear the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep and to do all his commandments and ceremonies which I command thee this day," said Moses once to the Jewish people, "all these curses shall come upon thee and overtake thee." (Deut. 28: 15.) And with those same fierce maledictions, the Lord still threatens all despisers of his holy word.

II. Another obstacle, my dear brethren, which opposes itself to the divine word and hinders its efficacy in souls, is *slothfulness in the retaining of it.*

1. I allude not, now, to those mere casual listeners to the word of God who come to a sermon with curiosity as to a comedy, and who confound the church with the theatre. Neither do I speak of those who attend sermons through compulsion, because they are commanded to do so by their parents or superiors. Still less, do I speak of those who come here to criticise us poor preachers, upon whom lies the heavy responsibility of announcing the Gospel. All these the prophet Ezekiel described and condemned in the following words: "And they come to thee as if a people were coming in: and my people sit before thee and hear thy words and do them not; for they turn them into a song of their mouth, and their heart goeth after their covetousness. And thou art to them as a musical song which is sung with a sweet and agreeable voice: and they hear thy words, and do them not." (Ezek. 33: 31,32.) I speak of those, on the contrary, who come to hear the word of God from a desire for salvation, but who are too slothful to retain it and to ponder upon it in their souls. I speak of those who hear the word of God from mere custom or habit.

2. Behold, the great multitude who hasten regularly and assiduously to assist at the sermons and instructions! It is true they are present in the church in body, but in spirit, alas! they are far away from it. Their thoughts are still at home; they are occupied with the things of this world, possibly, their attention is more engaged with the congregation around them, than with the words of the sermon. The voice

of the preacher, doubtless, strikes upon their ears, but it does not penetrate to their hearts.

3. He who brings nothing with him to the sermon, will take nothing away with him from it. He who is only present in the body, and who does not, with all the strength of his spirit and of his will, grasp the divine word and meditate upon it, will infallibly lose the blessings attached to it. "The heart of the fool, saith the Lord, is like a broken vessel ; and no wisdom at all shall it hold." (Eccles. 21: 17.)

Consider how the earth treats the seeds which are cast into its bosom. Does the soil do nothing to aid the growth of its myriad plants ? True, its upper crust may appear, at times, to be quite cold and dead, but beneath the surface all the hidden virtues and properties of the soil are in motion. It offers itself willingly and joyfully in all its various conditions to the plants, that they may fasten their roots therein. It gives them all the sap and nourishment of which they stand in need ; and thus they grow beautifully and luxuriantly, more through the aid of that vivifying sap, than by their own innate strength. So must divine and human activity meet and unite in us, if the seed of the word of God is to spring up and bear fruit in our souls. Otherwise, it will wither away like a plant whose roots rest in arid sand. If we are slothful in retaining the divine truths ; if we do not resemble those disciples of Jesus who said, when they heard his words : "Was not our heart burning within us, whilst he was speaking in the way, and opened to us the Scriptures" ? (Luke 24: 32,) if we cannot say with the Psalmist : "Thy words have I hidden in my heart," (Ps. 118: 11,) then, my brethren, the best of seed may be strewn in our hearts by the hand of God, only to remain dead and fruitless.

4. Again : when we hear a sermon, we neglect to apply it to ourselves, and to the particular condition of our souls. How many listen to the preacher with the greatest attention, admire his gestures, praise the fine delivery, and the beautiful treatment of the subject ! But alas ! that is as far as they go. The divine truths have made no practical impression upon their minds. They neither think of applying to their souls the words which they have heard, nor of examining, as in a mirror, the corresponding thoughts and actions of their lives.

Others, again, listen eagerly to the sermon, but only to apply it to the lives of their fellow-men. Such a one, they say, should have heard the discourse to-day ! It would have suited him word for word ! Alas ! what effect will the word of God have, if we do not apply it to ourselves ? The Samaritan woman, with whom Jesus so lovingly conversed at the well, and whom he reproached for her evil life, hastened

into the city, and said to all whom she met : "Come, and see a man who hath told me all things that ever I did." (John 4:29.) So should the word of God preached by the priest, the representative of Christ, lead us, in our turn, to examine into the secrets of our own hearts, into the thoughts, words, and actions of our lives, and to pass judgment upon their malice or their frailty. "'Thou art the man'!" (2 Kings 12:7) each one of us should cry out to himself, in the words wherein the prophet Nathan apostrophized the guilty King David. "It is thou, O my sinful soul ! who art here depicted,—it is to thee that the words of the preacher are directed !"

5. But, you say to me, perhaps, how is it possible to give one's undivided attention to every word of the preacher ? I am well aware of the inherent frailty of the human mind, which is so easily distracted from serious subjects ; but I reply, at the same time, that we are not actually obliged to comprehend, and consider, and apply every word of the sermon. It suffices to select some point which seems to us the most important, and the most useful for our spiritual needs. I, also, say that he who hears the word of God with a good and perfect heart, and who extracts from every sermon to which he listens, at least one solid truth, one saving sentence, will receive a ray of light for his future life, and a fountain of ceaseless blessings. Although, in time, we may apparently forget many of the preacher's words which we have considered with attention and devotion, yet, in reality, they are not lost. The immortal essence within us has a remarkable power and tenacity in itself. After many years, perchance, and always, (blessed be God !) at the right moment, those apparently long-forgotten words will appear bright and clear, conveying an instructive warning to our souls. "A man of sense will praise every wise word he shall hear, and will apply it to himself ; the luxurious man hath heard it, and it shall displease him, and he will cast it behind his back." (Eccles. 21:18.)

III. The greatest obstacle which we oppose to the word of God, and, at the same time, the greatest insult which we can offer to it, is *to slothfully refuse to profit by it*. It is only when we listen attentively to it, when we piously meditate upon it in our hearts, and conscientiously practise it in our lives,—it is only then, that we can hope for its full and perfect fruit.

I. Often, when hearing the word of God with a well-disposed heart, we make the finest resolutions, and form the most praiseworthy plans ! But, when the time of action arrives, ah ! then we become powerless, and the results show that all our edifying plans were only the dead-born children of our imagination ! Grace has done its part,—it has

touched our souls, and awakened our wills from the lethargy of indifference, but we, on our side, fail in the deed and in the work. Resolutions to avoid all the sins and vices so graphically depicted by the preacher ; to cultivate all those virtues which the word of God has inspired us to practice ; promises to approach the Sacraments with the most careful preparation, and to faithfully fulfil all the duties of one's state of life, — these, if ineffectual, are nothing more than blossoms upon a frost-blighted tree which bud forth, and drop off without producing any fruit. Yes, how many do we not behold, dear friends, who with tears of emotion in their eyes, seem to betray by their loud sighs and sobs, the dispositions of a repentant heart, and, yet, who fail to show any real amendment of life !

2. Our neglect to profit by the word of God destroys in us its beneficial effects. When King Saul, after having cruelly persecuted David, experienced at the hands of the latter the most undeserved magnanimity, he wept bitterly, and said to David : “ Thou art more just than I : for thou hast done good to me ; and I have rewarded thee with evil. And thou hast shown this day what good things thou hast done to me ; how the Lord delivered me into thy hand, and thou hast not killed me.” (1 Kings 24 : 17, 19.) But alas ! these good dispositions of the king were but evanescent ; they did not permanently influence his actions. After a few days, in spite of his grateful protestations, he again attempted to take the life of David. So the Christian who fails to profit by the divine word, is guilty of the greatest ingratitude to God ; and not only shows him the greatest disrespect, but places the strongest obstacle to his own eternal salvation.

3. “ He that heareth you, heareth me,” said Christ to his Apostles, “ and he that despiseth you, despiseth me. And he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.” (Luke 10 : 16.) We, the preachers of the holy Gospel, are only the mouthpiece of God to announce his word • to your souls. Nothing happens accidentally or by chance in our external life, even the smallest of all its daily occurrences are arranged by the gracious providence of God ; and there is still less of accident or chance in the ordering of our inner spiritual life. From all eternity, the Lord has reckoned and determined every divine word that shall fall upon our souls for their salvation. It is his mercy which puts this word into the mouth of the preacher, which causes it to move us so deeply, and to penetrate into our souls like an arrow. It is his mercy which leads us at this season into the church and there touches our hearts. Is it not, then, the greatest ingratitude to him to thus thrust his graces away from us, and to destroy the effects of his blessed word ? May not the Lord cry out to us, as he did to the Jews of old :

“ The queen of the south shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it : because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon : and behold ! a greater than Solomon is here ! ” (Matth. 12 : 42.) The very heathens themselves, benighted as they are, would have manifested more gratitude if they had had the divine mercies as fully as we,—if God had spoken to them as powerfully through his holy word, as he has spoken to us !

4. Our ingratitude contains in itself a still greater wrong,—that of an abominable contempt of God’s majesty. He who will not hear the word of God, and who through slothfulness, will not obey it, despises and scorns the heavenly Benefactor who approaches his soul with designs of gracious love. Like sacred grains of incense, the Lord casts his word abroad among mankind, that it may be enkindled in glowing and zealous hearts, and through the good works to which it prompts us, may ascend as a holy perfume to heaven. But he who permits the word of God, like a dead seed, to rot in his soul ; he who allows the grain of incense which the Lord casts into his heart, to remain useless and cold and unkindled by the fire of zeal, and divine love, that man, my brethren, contemns the gracious hand of him who has mercifully placed the treasure in his soul. He who hears the message of his sovereign, and does not obey it, despises the word of the king as well as his person !

5. What will be the consequence of all this ingratitude and contempt of God ? The Lord will turn away his face from those who merely hear his word, without keeping it. Therefore, St. James warns us : “ Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if a man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer ; he shall be compared to a man beholding his natural countenance in a glass : for he beheld himself, and went his way, and presently forgot what manner of man he was.” (St. James 1 : 22-24.) Where hearing of the divine word is not attended by that earnestness of will which prompts us to follow its teachings, there will it be fruitless and without benefit ; and such a heart will remain barren and devoid of virtue. “ For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified,” says St. Paul. (Rom. 2 : 13.) He who opposes an idle heart to the grace of God, and he who in his slothfulness falls back into tepidity, after grace has already taken possession of him, and warmed him, shall find himself, at last, entirely forsaken by that priceless gift of God. Balthassar, king of Babylon, having provoked the wrath of the Most High by his sins and sacrileges, saw an invisible hand write mysterious words on the wall of his royal chamber. The prophet Daniel interpreted them to the affrighted king, and

announced to him the speedy punishment of heaven, if he did not turn away from his scandalous and impious way. Balthassar rewarded Daniel who had thus announced to him the will of God. He dressed him in purple, and hung a golden chain around his neck. But, nevertheless, the king did not arise from his sacrilegious banquet to appease the wrath of God. Not a single prayer did he utter, and in the same night he was slain. (Dan. 5 : 30.) He who hears the word of God without profiting by it, runs tremendous risks, and grievously imperils his salvation.

Let us, therefore, in hearing the word of God, cry out, as St. Paul did in the very first moment of his conversion : "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ?" (Acts 9 : 6.) And then, like the seed-corn, rich in measure and quality, we shall permit the word of God to be cast into the furrows of our heart, and, (concealing it there within its secret folds,) we shall behold it spring up in its proper season, and bring forth precious fruits for salvation, yea, even the golden harvest of everlasting happiness ! Amen.

BISHOP EHRLER.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.

SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS A PUNISHMENT OF SIN.

“What wilt thou that I do to thee? But he said: Lord that I may see.” (Luke 18: 41.)

The Jews in Jerusalem sought to kill our Saviour after he had restored Lazarus to life. They were displeased because he told them that they should pay tribute to Cæsar; and they feared, moreover, that the Romans might come upon them with a vast army, and exterminate them. Caiphas persuaded them that it was permitted by the law to put to death an innocent person, in order to prevent a greater evil. Jesus knew all this; nevertheless he went up to Jerusalem, and, among other miracles which he performed there, he opened the eyes of a blind man. The deluded Jews, however, he left in their spiritual blindness. I ask, why was this done? In answer, we find that the blind man of Jericho, unlike the Jews, had done nothing to deserve the affliction under which he labored.

Spiritual blindness, then, is

- I. *A punishment of sin; and*
- II. *An unperceived punishment.*

I. God is just in all his judgments, and the sinner fully deserves punishment, because

1. *He wilfully turns away from the light, that is, the Creator; and*
2. *He deliberately turns toward the darkness, that is, the creature.*

1. The only true happiness of man is found in clear vision of God. Here below, he can only see God by faith; but, nevertheless, through divine grace, he is enlightened by him who is Eternal Light. Now, he who wilfully turns his back upon this true light, becomes blind by his own act, and this blindness is the beginning of all succeeding punishments. As it is a sin to turn away from God, so also this blindness is, at the same time, a sin and a punishment of sin.

2. This punishment is so much the more severe, because it withdraws us from the knowledge of God. We see God by our understanding, and God is the object which should engross our understanding, because

he is the Eternal Truth. Now, he that turns away from this Eternal Truth, goes towards the darkness, and, as St. Bernard justly observes on the text : “ Their foolish heart was darkened : ” (Rom. 1 : 21.) “ As they have despised the truth which they have known, they are justly punished in no longer being able to recognize the truth. What is more wicked than to despise the truth ? But what is more just than to withdraw from the despiser of truth that which he has contemned ? ” (St. Bernard.) “ And as they liked not,” says St. Paul, “ to have God in their knowledge ; God delivered them up to a reprobate sense, to do those things which are not convenient.” (Rom. 1 : 28.) Therefore, the first sin is the parent of the second, the second of the third, and so on. If we wish to search out the first cause of eternal condemnation, we shall find that this blindness is the beginning of all punishments, even those which are eternal.

II. The most distressing thing about this judgment of God is, that one does not recognize it as a punishment.

1. *The sinner is not only ignorant of his blindness ; but*
2. *He even thinks himself far more enlightened than before.*

1. To be blind and not to be aware of one’s blindness ! How shall I explain this seeming contradiction ? Let me illustrate it by certain Scriptural examples. The men of Sodom “ pressed very violently upon Lot ” to compel him to produce the two Angels to whom he had shown hospitality. But the two heavenly guests “ put out their hands and drew in Lot unto them, and shut the door. And them that were without, they struck with blindness from the least to the greatest, so that they could not find the door.” (Gen. 19 : 9, 10, 11.) The wretched people could see everything except the door. In the same manner, the soldiers of the king of Syria were blinded by Eliseus, so that they walked into the midst of their enemies without knowing it. They were not aware of their blindness until Eliseus prayed to God : “ Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the Lord opened their eyes ; and they saw themselves to be in the midst of Samaria.” (4 Kings 6 : 20.) Thus it is with the sinful soul. It rushes to destruction with open eyes. It is forced to say with the Psalmist : “ My iniquities have overtaken me, and I was unable to see.” (Ps. 39 : 13.)

2. Sinners, in their great misery, mistake their darkness for the light of noon-day. Some of the Pharisees who were with Jesus said to him : “ Are we also blind ? ” Jesus said to them : “ If you were blind, you should not have sin ; but now you say : We see, your sin remaineth.”

(John 9: 40.) This blindness was the punishment of their sins. "And Jesus said to them: For judgment I am come into this world; that they who see not may see: and they who see may become blind." (John 9: 39.) Oh, what a fearful and terrible punishment! Before the coming of Christ, the whole world sat in darkness, but, through his teaching, the blind saw. But how could those who enjoyed the blessing of sight become blind? Upon this point, the words of St. Augustine are very significant: "Who are those that see? They are the Jews. Is it then true that they see? No, they only imagine that they see, while, in truth, they do not see. They are blind, but, by a just punishment of God, they know it not. They boast that they see the light, after having crucified the Light of the world. Oh, fearful blindness! They have murdered the Light!"

Oh, how vast is the multitude of these deluded blind men! It is only by keeping far from sin, that we can be preserved from their terrible affliction. My brethren, are you not blind, perhaps, at present, because of your sins, and yet suspect not your blindness? If so, you can now make yourselves see. Return to God. "Come ye to him and be enlightened." (Ps. 33: 6.) "The Lord is my light and my salvation," (Ps. 26: 1,) says the Psalmist. If you have been so unfortunate as to lose this light through sin, seek to regain it through penance "that the darkness overtake you not: he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may be the children of light." (John 12: 35, 36.)

B.

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY.]

THE CROSS OF CHRIST THE SOVEREIGN REMEDY FOR THE THREE-FOLD DISORDERS OF THE PRESENT AGE.

“This is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders ; which is become the head of the corner ; nor is there salvation in any other. For there is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved. (Acts 4 : 11, 12.)

The present Sunday is the beginning of the holy season of Lent. By the words of the Gospel, as well as by the ashes which will be strewed upon our heads during the coming week, we will be consecrated to the penitential spirit of the time. The bitter Passion and Death of our Lord should now form the subject of our continual meditations. Our altars from this out must be covered with the violet shadows of penance, whence the cross of Christ shall shine forth, powerfully attracting us to his crucified feet. The images of the Saints, and other festive adornments of the altar disappear ; the naked cross alone must preach to us in this holy season.

Let us, then, to-day, seriously contemplate the sacred cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, recognizing it as the great and only remedy for the manifold disorders of our present age. “In no other, save your crucified Redeemer, is there salvation,” cries that holy Cross to us, “for there is no other name save *his* under heaven given to men whereby they may be saved !” The admonitions which our crucified Saviour addresses to us from the Tree of Golgotha,—the innumerable and inestimable blessings which flow upon us therefrom,—are the only remedies for those great wounds now open and bleeding in the disordered body of modern society. This sign of salvation is the only panacea for the united maladies and miseries of human souls.

Thousands, alas ! have forgotten these emphatic words of the apostle Peter : “In no other is salvation.” They blindly seek health and deliverance in the perishable things of this earthly life ; and are astonished to find them all of no avail. As a sick man, tortured with pain, groaning and complaining upon his hard bed, turns himself now upon this side and then upon that ;—this hour consulting one physician, and the next, another, till he exhausts himself by the fickle use of innumerable remedies ; so this world of ours rolls around upon its

uneasy couch of pain, and tries one remedy after another, for the relief of its countless ills. It complains of the hard bed upon which it lies ; the changed conditions of life, which it fancies, must be the cause of its pain. It murmurs against the laws of both Church and State ; it tries new remedies for public as well as private evils ; and vainly hopes for civil and social improvement. That all its troubles lie in the corruption of the human heart and not in the external conditions of life, is as little comprehended by the world, as the sick man understands the source of his own miseries, when he complains of his bed, of his medicine, or of the physician who attends him.

But what are the wounds from which human society bleeds, in our day, and which the Cross of Jesus Christ alone can close and heal ? I know of no other than those which St. John, with an intimate knowledge of the human heart, calls the three great wounds of the world. *“All that is in the world, is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life ;* which is not of the Father but is of the world.” (1 John 2 : 16.) Let us, then, dear Christians, consider to-day the Cross of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as the true remedy :

- I. *For the concupiscence of the eyes ;*
- II. *The concupiscence of the flesh ;* and
- III. *The pride of life.*

I. Materialism is the first great wound from which human society bleeds at the present time.

I. A certain amount of earthly goods is absolutely necessary for the corporal needs of man ; and the Creator himself has planted in our hearts a rational desire for the acquisition of such goods. According to the will of God, the supernatural or heavenly kingdom is erected upon the earthly one, and through earthly means. But, although our heads are meant to be raised up to heaven and our eyes to pierce the clouds, our feet are planted upon the earth, and are destined to climb from the dim valleys of terrestrial trials, up to the mountain-top of endless glory. Without somewhat of earthly possessions, the spiritual problem of our lives could not be solved. Thus the Lord has bestowed upon us manifold powers of soul and body ; and has ordained that through earthly labor in the sweat of our brows, we should merit and attain eternal happiness. God, in his love, even rewards our labors in this life with temporal goods, as a sure pledge that he will give to the Christian soul that labors with love and fidelity the higher goods of everlasting life. The blessing of Esau, which the Christian receives and enjoys upon earth from the

hand of God, his Father, is a guarantee to him of the blessing of Jacob as well,— of the heavenly promises and of eternal goods.

2. But, alas ! these earthly goods are far too sweet and tempting to us poor mortals ! Possessing them, man easily forgets that they are only a means leading to an eternal end,— not that great end itself.

Satan had once the bold audacity to tempt our divine Lord with all the kingdoms of this world and glory thereof, saying : “ All these will I give thee, if, falling down, thou wilt adore me ! ” (Matth. 4 : 9.) The more completely divine faith and hope vanish from the heart of man, the more he forgets that this earthly life is merely a ladder whereby he mounts to the attainment of his final aim ; and the more he forgets this vital and radical principle, so much the more will an earthly mind grow gross and strong within him. Instead of adoring the Lord God and longing for his celestial kingdom, he will bow the knee before the Golden Calf, and adore it as his idol.

3. This concupiscence of the eyes is the deepest and widest wound in the great body of our modern society. Money,— money,— money, acquiring and heaping it up in great quantities, by fair means or foul, has become the only aim and object of the life of man, the main-spring of all his cares and anxieties. Growing prosperity, flourishing industries, widespread trade and commerce, the greatest possible production and consumption, these are the highest desires of the world, and are prized as the only remedy for its manifold ills. The desire to become rich has turned the heads, and desolated the hearts of innumerable men.

4. In a heart exclusively controlled by this materialistic tendency, no aspirations after God and his holy kingdom, nothing, in short, that is high or noble, can possibly exist. It will entertain no desire for prayer or the Sacraments ; it will neglect or abuse all the services of the Church, all the divine means of grace. Or if such a heart should turn itself to God, and, in slavish fear, perform its religious duties, it is much to be feared that its service is not prompted by love, but only by the selfish desire to obtain the divine help in its temporal undertakings and speculations.

5. Hence, this Materialism is the mother of egotism and of self-love, as well as of many sins against our neighbor ! Envy and jealousy, theft and robbery have no other cause than this inordinate passion for earthly goods which appears exclusively to govern men. St. Basil truly says : “ The love of money fills forests with robbers, houses with thieves, families with discontent, markets with lies, courts of justice with false oaths, the abodes of innocence with want and misery,

the eyes of orphans with tears, the heart of the widow with sighs, prisons with criminals, and hell with damned souls." The whole order of human society must, of necessity, be undermined and dissolved when its members have been corrupted by this selfish spirit of covetousness. Laws, morals, and virtue will no longer lead men to a higher aim ; since this wild and cruel greed for earthly things will naturally make every man the mortal enemy of his neighbor, and drive all alike into a desperate battle for life or death.

4. What is the sovereign remedy for all this ? What shall close these deadly wounds of our hearts ? Here human help is in vain. If every man were permitted to enrich himself at some newly-discovered El Dorado, those vast treasures of gold, far from remedying the evil, would only serve to enkindle more powerfully the passions of men. They would then combat each other with more dangerous weapons than at present. Greater greed would rend the wounds of their hearts, and leave them deeper and wider than before. The best laws of the state will not banish or even diminish the misery of the earth, if covetousness be not first eradicated. The highest development of industry, and all the luxuries of life will not make the world happier, or more contented. The impoverishment of the great masses as opposed to the happiness of the few, and the fearful cry of Communism, bloody rapine, and everlasting war, will be the end of society and civilization, if the covetous inclinations in men are not up-rooted and destroyed. The disease itself must be cured ; and the only remedy for this is the holy Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no salvation in any other. Behold ! upon the cross the Saviour of the world hangs poor and naked ! He, who during his whole life had no place in which to lay his head, dies in the end upon the hard wood of that cruel Tree. His enemies have stript him even of his necessary clothing. Deprived of everything earthly, he departs this life. In his birth, and still more in his life, he had discarded all the outward pomp and splendor of earth. Even his heavenly glory, which as the only-begotten Son of the Eternal Father, belongs to him of right,—even that celestial splendor, he veiled and concealed under the homely garments of poverty and lowness ; and poorer than the poorest son of man, he died upon the cross.

Should not a glance, then, at the holy Cross of Christ root out all our earthly desires ? The crib in which our Saviour once lay, the poor swaddling clothes which covered him, the dwelling of the poor mechanic in which he grew up, the humble life, in fine, which he led from first to last, should certainly stifle and destroy every unlawful and inordinate desire for temporal goods.

5. The Cross of Jesus Christ declares most powerfully and emphatically to men, that the concupiscence of the eyes, the greed of money and the desire for riches are a contradiction of our Christian vocation, since to be a true Christian is to resemble closely our crucified Saviour. The Cross teaches us to strive for heavenly goods alone, and to cast from us all earthly and sinful ones, as unworthy of the disciples of a crucified Redeemer. The Cross admonishes the poor to bear their poverty patiently, looking upon their divine Model who lived in poverty thirty-three years, and who died as the poorest of men. The Cross demands of them to regard without envy the greater abundance of temporal goods in the hands of the rich, and to love poverty, inasmuch as through it they more closely resemble their Master. The Cross constrains the rich to generosity in helping the needs of the poor, so that the great gulf between wealth and poverty may be filled up by Christian charity. The Cross teaches them, in the midst of their riches, to live poor in spirit, and to strive after higher possessions.

Thus the blessing of the Cross, and the graces flowing from it, will lend to rich and poor alike the courage to act up to such exalted sentiments, and so arrange every circumstance of life as to take the sting from misfortune and privation ; and by holy fraternal charity, prepare a suitable medicine for every malady of modern times.

II. "*In no other is salvation ; for there is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we may be saved.*"

1. The second wound of the human heart, is *the concupiscence of the flesh*, or the unlawful desire of sensual pleasures. Man, being created for happiness, continually seeks his heaven here below. All his efforts, all his labors and sacrifices from his youth upwards, aim only at this, *that he may be happy*. Alas ! the heaven he makes himself is too often a Mohammedan Paradise. The concupiscence of the eyes passionately urges him on to the concupiscence of the flesh. He covets these earthly goods, merely in the hope that they will purchase for him sensual joys and delights.

2. The pious Christian gratefully enjoys the temporal goods with which the love of God enriches him. But he directs his eyes beyond them to that other and better Land to which he is hastening, well-knowing that there the mansions of unchanging and eternal bliss await him. He endeavors with all the gifts and powers of his life to make himself worthy of that heavenly felicity. Cheerfully he makes every sacrifice which God demands of him, so that he may, one day, enjoy a greater beatitude. And though his life in this world be only

one long succession of wants, a chain of sufferings and weary trials, yet the hope that, in another life, a heaven of joy awaits him, sustains and encourages him here below, to bear the heaviest cross. The heavenly bliss to come sheds its golden beams already upon this mortal life, and gives to him peace of heart and happiness of soul, as far as it is possible for him to possess and enjoy those treasures here below.

3. But the sinner, the gross and carnal man, cries out, on the contrary : “Come, let us enjoy the good things that are present, and let us speedily use the creatures as in youth. Let us fill ourselves with costly wine, and ointments ; and let not the flower of the time pass by us. Let us crown ourselves with roses, before they be withered : let no meadow escape our riot. Let none of us go without his part in luxury : let us everywhere leave tokens of joy : for this is our portion, and this our lot !” (Wisdom 2 : 6-9.)

The gross and sinful enjoyments of this world, being present and tangible, have, alas ! a stronger fascination for the human heart than the unseen and spiritual joys of heaven. Hence proceeds that inordinate love of pleasure which is growing so rapidly in our times. Heaven and the Hereafter have disappeared from the thoughts of the vast multitude of men, and the present world alone satisfies and governs them. To eat, drink, and be merry to-day, and again to-morrow to eat, drink and be merry, is, with the majority, the sole aim in life. “Let us enjoy the good things and pleasures of this life as long as we can,” they call to each other, “for when death comes, all is over” !

4. From youth till old age, they wallow in the intoxication of sin : wasting in it all the powers of their being ; the lust of pleasure stirs even the last drop of their miserable blood. In this feverish excitement and love of pleasure, they make no distinction between lawful and unlawful enjoyments. The cup of earthly pleasure must be greedily drained to the dregs, no matter whether it contain forbidden enjoyments or not. Nothing can hold back the sensual sinner, if the thirst for a new pleasure entice or torment him. Effeminacy and ease, voluptuousness and sensuality, passion and intemperance, debauchery of youth, defilement of the marriage-vows, and carnal idiocy in old age—such words describe the life of human society in our day. “No self-denial, no mortification, no self-abnegation, no sacrifice for a higher life !”—such is the shameless clamor of multitudes of sinful hearts to-day. Every precept of the Church, is for *them*, alas ! too hard and heavy, inasmuch as it requires from them some sacrifice. The precept of fasting is transgressed, and the desire of our holy Church for penance and Christian self-denial is cried down as an exaggerated and overstrained demand.

Hence, also, that tormenting unrest and discontent which trouble the hearts of men, and which can be read in the very faces of the present generation. For this one the bed, in which the Creator has placed him, is too narrow. For that one the situation is too hard and uncomfortable, because it does not afford him sufficient pleasure and enjoyment. Hence that frightful poverty and need which desolate human society in our days. All the vast and gigantic remedies which are at present at the command of the world are too small and insufficient, because the unrestrained love of pleasure consumes the fortunes of millions as a drop of water disappears upon the surface of a hot stove.

5. Here again the Cross of Jesus Christ is the only remedy. "*There is no salvation in any other.*" The Saviour hangs upon the cross, crowned with thorns and wounded in every member of his sacred body; his back and shoulders are gashed with countless stripes, his hands and feet are torn with cruel nails; his sacred Heart is pierced with a lance; his disciples have forsaken him. In the burning thirst which consumes him he receives from his enemies naught save vinegar and gall. Throughout his whole mortal life, he despised all the pleasures of sense, and never sought for temporal happiness. And in his death upon the cross, he delivered his virginal flesh to every pain and torture, in order to heal our weakness and infirmity. All his limbs are stretched out, all his bones are dislocated, all his nerves are torn. Living, he ascends the cross, and calls to us from that height of suffering: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." (Matth. 16: 24.)

Can you contemplate your Saviour trembling and sorrowful in the Garden of Olives, crowned with thorns, and dying upon the cross in the greatest agony—and yet desire earthly pleasures? Will you make joy and amusement the only object of your life, when you behold an Incarnate God expiring for you in an abyss of pain and anguish? When our Head is crowned with thorns, how can we, its members, long for earthly lusts and pleasures?

The Cross of Jesus Christ teaches man that he is born to enter heaven, like his Saviour, through much strife and suffering, and there enjoy true, unalloyed happiness. The cross invites him to despise sensual joys and delights, and to desire labor and sacrifices, if he would win the happiness of the Hereafter, in fuller, richer measure. Even the most passionate cry of the human heart for earthly pleasures, is silenced at the feet of the Crucified.

The sight of the Cross cannot fail to inspire the Christian with the spirit of self-sacrifice, and generosity with his fellows. The grace and

the blessing of the Cross, therefore, alone can convert the earth into a sort of paradise, in so far as the cross teaches man contentment with his lot, and helps him, for the love of Christ, to renounce his own pleasure for the happiness of the unfortunate and the needy. The cross of the Lord, if it be loved by man, will infallibly show him the way to eternal bliss.

III. "*In no other is salvation : for there is no other name under heaven given to man whereby he may be saved.*"

1. As the last and most dangerous malady of the human heart, St. John names *the pride of life*. With justice did the great Evangelist place this disease last in the list of our triple miseries. Alas ! it is the most dangerous of all, and the most deeply rooted in the human heart ! The concupiscence of the eyes, and that of the flesh, are often repressed by the power of outward circumstances ; but the pride of life, being a spiritual vice, and having its seat exclusively in the soul, is able to uproot every good from our hearts, and to take full possession of our entire being.

2. Every child of Adam is inclined to pride. The Lord, in his goodness and love, has granted to his creatures an extraordinary rank and importance. He has made man great and glorious before his face. "Thou hast made him a little less than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honor : and hast set him over the works of thy hands." (Psalm 8: 6, 7.) We have an immortal destiny which exalts us above all the creatures of the earth. Each one of us is a prince of the celestial court, and wears a royal crown upon his head. We all are heirs of an eternal inheritance. But in humility of heart, we must submit our will to that of the Almighty, and thus, through humble obedience to the divine commands, we shall earn our greatness and glory in the future life.

3. He in whom holy faith is living and active, will aspire solely to this spiritual grandeur, this celestial glory. The more man despises the admonitions of our holy faith, and the less he looks at his true greatness before God, the more will the pride of earthly things govern him. He will forget his true and proper worth, the dignity and value of his soul, and seek for an imaginary earthly greatness in the pride of possessing the riches of the world. In the presumption and arrogance of his heart, he will oppose every human and divine law, and consider his own will the only guide of his life, saying with Pharaoh : "Who is the Lord that I should hear his voice, and let Israel go ? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." (Exod. 5 : 2).

4. This forgetfulness of God, these false conclusions which man forms to himself as to his own greatness and glory, are the causes of that unbounded pride which we recognize and deplore as the deepest source of all the evils of the world. Have not the spokesmen of Infidelity called aloud to the world, that the human will is the last and highest law of the land? Has not the false philosophy of our century raised up man in the place of God, and taught in all seriousness that our will is a part of the everlasting will of God, which finds expression through us? A joyful and consenting echo to such propositions must resound in the proud nature of man.

Look into the world, and see how this pride of life poisons innumerable souls! That natural modesty which restrains man within his appointed limits, and preserves his proper relations with his Creator,—that true greatness which humility of heart teaches and produces—are all fast disappearing from the face of the earth. An invincible pride misleads the whole world, and makes man degrade and belittle the divine truths. Universal liberty, absolute independence, (bound by no law either human or divine,) this is the motto of modern society. The obedience of children to their parents threatens to vanish in this whirlwind of freedom which confuses all the faculties of the soul. The laws of the state are only observed through fear of punishment, and are broken as soon as the compulsory power is withdrawn. The precepts of the Church which command humble obedience, are as a heavy chain, which every rational being (so they say) should cast away from him; and that submission which makes the true Christian bow his understanding to the teachings of faith and of revelation, is reckoned by these independent thinkers a species of insanity or idiocy. The Church of Jesus Christ with all her supernatural order of grace is considered a tyrannical institution to which, with justice, the freedom of the human spirit will no longer submit. In fine, the world of to-day wishes and hopes to find an ideal future, a chimerical condition of society, in which every one is to command and no one to obey.

5. This human pride which would fain transform the lowest beggar upon earth into a king, is the cause of innumerable infractions of the laws of God and man. From it springs, as from its proper source, the want of faith so prevalent in our present age. Of it, also, is begotten that spirit of impiety which regards nothing as sacred save that which pleases the popular humor or passions. A feeling of discomfort and of tormenting unrest, causes the structure of modern society to shudder and tremble, even as the strong building shakes under the tremor of the destructive earthquake. All social order seems about to totter to its fall. Pride is the sole origin of these dangerous convulsions. And the present hatred and jealousy among men, the burning

desire for worldly grandeur and distinction, and the blind and furious mania which manifests itself at the slightest injury or insult, are only the unhappy consequences of this fatal pride.

6. What can help us in this terrible crisis? Shall we place every one upon that dizzy height to which his imagination and his wishes would fain exalt him? Even a child can see at a glance that this would be impossible. If every man is to be a superior where shall we find the subordinate who is to listen and obey? The theory of unlimited freedom and unrestrained independence of the human spirit is a great fallacy, and an utter impossibility. It is a repetition of that temptation of the Evil One, who said to the first man, "You shall be as gods" (Gen. 3:5); and hence, it is a diabolical and hellish thought which fastens itself upon the heart of man only to destroy it. No finite being is wholly independent. Independence or freedom from all restraints, belongs only to the perfections of him who is called the Infinite. Both in Church and state there must be a higher authority to which every one is bound to submit,—otherwise human society would fall into ruin, and e quickly dissolved.

Here the cross of Jesus Christ alone can help us. "*There is no salvation in any other.*" Behold, our dying Saviour hangs upon the wood shame and infamy! Not only is he racked with pain and covered with wounds, but he is mocked and despised by those who have prepared these torments for him. He is nailed to the cross as an evildoer and a criminal, as a seducer of the people, and the outcast of men. "He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross." (Phil. 2:8.) In obedience to the will of his Heavenly Father, he came down from heaven upon earth, and through obedience, assumed human flesh. Submissively, he fulfilled all the commands of the law upon earth; he was obedient to his earthly parents and subject to them for thirty years. Through obedience, finally he submits to death, "even unto the death of the cross," and prays in the Garden of Olives: "Not as I will, but as thou wilt!" (Matth. 26:39). Through this heavenly obedience, he ascends the cross and dies upon it, thereby perfecting and crowning that glorious virtue. Can you then proudly stand by the Cross of Jesus Christ, and in the arrogance of your heart say: "Who is the Lord, that I should hear his voice?" Even the most unlimited and presumptuous pride of man, must vanish at the feet of the Crucified One.

The cross of Jesus Christ teaches man to walk in humility of heart, and to submit obediently to the will of God. The cross gives him the strength and the grace to make every sacrifice of obedience willingly and cheerfully, in order more closely to resemble his crucified Redeemer. The cross tells him that he is a poor, sinful creature;

that he has been under the degrading slavery of the devil, and that he has no cause for pride, in himself. The cross tells him that the dignity and worth of his being, lie in nothing earthly, but in his sublime inner value—in that image of God, which, through the blood of the Crucified Saviour, was washed and cleansed in us from every stain of sin. The cross admonishes him to seek for true greatness through a virtuous life, and in this manner to make himself worthy of the heavenly glory.

If we would all live as the holy cross teaches us, if we would but bear the cross upon our foreheads and in all the members of our body; if that holy and saving sign were only engraved indelibly in our souls, then every misery and every want in life would disappear, and every wound of the heart would be closed.

Let us, then, go up to Jerusalem with our Lord and his disciples at this holy season, and in all our tribulations let us raise up our eyes to the holy Cross and listen to its lessons. Through its saving influence and power we shall be truly blessed,—for there alone lies our real happiness, there alone lies our eternal salvation. Amen.

BISHOP EHRLER.

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT.

TEMPTATIONS.

“Jesus saith to him : Begone, Satan : for it is written : The Lord thy God thou shalt adore, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil left him.” (Matth. 4 : 10, 11.)

For love of us, our Saviour became man,—partly, to redeem us from the yoke of sin,—and partly, to show us, by his example, the right path to heaven.—Temptations interpose the greatest obstacles to our salvation. Therefore, our Redeemer suffered himself to be tempted—that we might learn from him how to overcome the tempter. He is the skilful General who has taught his soldiers by word and example the grand science of spiritual combat. My beloved brethren, allow me, to-day, to make known to you the laws which govern this science. There are chiefly three points wherein Satan seeks to ensnare us.

- I. *The lusts of the flesh ;*
- II. *The frowardness of the understanding ; and*
- III. *The pride of life.*

How should a man meet these temptations?

Let him only compare divine joys with the base gratifications afforded by these three sources of temptation, and he will find it impossible to yield to the latter.

I. Consider

1. *That the world promises carnal pleasures to its votaries ; but*
2. *That joy in God is far sweeter and more lasting.*

1. *How empty and transitory are those pleasures which are always followed by pain ! Manifold are the vexations and miseries which forbidden enjoyments cause the children of this world ! Men often risk their honor and good name,—yea, even put their lives in danger for some vile amusement of an idle hour. What torment can be compared with that of a man who loves and sees that he is not loved in return ; who spends his money and lavishes his gifts in vain ; who can not gratify his guilty passions ; or, who lives in continual dread lest his evil deeds should come to light ?*

Jealousy, fear, love itself, torment him, and he needs no other scourge than the sharp stings of his own passionate heart. Can this be called pleasure?

2. On the contrary, divine love gives to man a true and lasting happiness. God can find no greater satisfaction than in himself, and where can we seek for greater happiness than in God? This happiness is as eternal as its Object. Death itself can not terminate it, but, on the contrary, only gives to it a fresh beginning. Even in this life, the love of God sweetens all trials and labors; for the true lover fears no labor; all difficulties and obstacles are cheerfully overcome for the sake of the beloved. In short, a soul that has tasted of the heavenly manna of interior satisfaction in God, will certainly have a disgust for the flesh-pots of Egypt. "O taste, and see that the Lord is sweet." (Ps. 33:9.)

Remember

II. That if the world proposes to you doubts and objections to faith,

1. *God is the eternal truth;*
2. *He can not err or make a mistake.*

1. Man frequently prefers to pry into divine mysteries rather than believe in them. Some must know the why and the wherefore of every thing. "Why do the wicked prosper?" they question. "And wherefore are the good oppressed?" They would fain weigh the dogmas of faith in the scales of their own finite reason. They would decide points of doctrine according to their own fancy, rather than by the revelation of God and the decrees of his holy Church. There are ignorant people who will argue upon Predestination, and the possibility of Transubstantiation. What pleasure can they find in such discussions? They belong to "the unlearned and unstable" of whom the apostle complains that they wrest the Word of God to their own destruction. As a just punishment, they fall from one doubt into another. They bewilder themselves and others—they become perverts.

2. How complete would be the satisfaction of these unhappy men, if, turning from all disputed questions, they would fix their eyes upon the truth and infallibility of God! The divine mysteries are unfathomable. "Thy judgments, O Lord, are a great deep," (Ps. 35:7) which human reason may admire, but can never fathom! Many natural causes of material things must ever remain hidden from our comprehension,—how much less, then, are we able to understand the sublime and secret mysteries of God! Shall we be foolish enough to declare that because we can not comprehend a thing, therefore, it is

impossible ! That because we do not know why this or that happens, therefore it is not well that it should happen !

III. Remember again :

1. *That if the world promises you great honors and exalted dignities,*
2. *That the kingdom of God is greater and nobler than all these.*

1. Worthless, indeed, are all the dignities of this world ! In a short time, they "shall come to nothing, and vanish like smoke." (Ps. 36 : 20.) No sooner has a man attained the pinnacle of fame, than he is carried off by death. "Thou seest a man in an elevated position ; thou esteemest him as noble and exalted," says St. Ambrose, "soon thou learnest that another has succeeded him, and thou askest : Where is the former incumbent who was so noble and distinguished ? Thou art simply told : He has disappeared." It is not necessary now, my beloved, to enlarge upon the inconstancy of fortune, the envy of inferiors, the misrepresentations of enemies, and the fear of losing the grace of God. To all of these even the highest positions are liable.

2. Let a man compare this so-called happiness with the genuine satisfaction of the Christian who enjoys the grace and love of God. A brief comparison between the finite and the Infinite will plainly show the emptiness of all worldly dignities. The kingdom of God is greater, its grades are nobler, its dignities are eternal. And to what a height of honor are not those raised to whom our Saviour said : "You also shall sit on twelve seats judging the twelve tribes of Israel." (Matth. 19 : 28.) "Thus shall he be honored, whom the king hath a mind to honor." (Esth. 6 : 9.)

You now know, beloved brethren, the laws of the spiritual combat. There is nothing more to do but to encourage you in the warfare. Keep yourselves in constant practice, and if the tempter assails you, say to him : "Begone, Satan ! Why do you flatter me ? That which engages my love is far sweeter than any thing that you can offer me !" O my dear Christians, you have enlisted under the banner of Christ ; then, I beseech you, with St. Paul : "In all things, taking the shield of faith, and taking unto you the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, (which is the word of God)," (Ephes. 6 : 16,) "put ye on the armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the snares of the devil." (Ibid. 11 verse.) B.

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT.

TEMPTATIONS.

"Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the devil." (Matt. 4: 1.)

The mysterious temptation of our Lord in the desert, while it can only be explained and understood in connection with his dignity as the Messiah, is nevertheless a great source of consolation for Christian souls. As the devil approached our first parents, Adam and Eve, in order to seduce them from obedience to God, so he approaches every member of the human family, for the same nefarious end. "Be sober and watch," says the Prince of the Apostles, "because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist ye, strong in faith: knowing that the same affliction befalleth your brethren who are in the world" (1 Pet. 5: 8, 9.); and St. Paul adds: "Put ye on the armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the snares of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers: against the rulers of the world of this darkness: against the spirits of wickedness in the high places." (Ephes. 6: 11, 12.)

From within and without, through our friends and through our enemies, through the world, the flesh and the devil, the toils of temptation are continually cast around our souls. No place is so holy or secluded that Satan cannot find entrance; no man is so secure in virtue and perfection that he cannot seize and afflict him. Day and night, openly and concealed, he aims his poisonous arrows at us. Every one according to his condition and particular circumstances of life, has particular temptations. These temptations are as manifold as life is many-sided, out of every thing on earth, the devil knows to make a snare for the ruin of souls. Before the door of our hearts, sin ever lurks, seeking an entrance into the secret sanctuary of the soul.

Why does our good God permit all these varied temptations? Does he will our destruction? Is it really his intention to plunge us into sin? Impossible; for God being Eternal Holiness cannot will evil, and being Mercy itself, he desires all men to be saved. "Let no man, when he is tempted, say that he is tempted of God: for God is not the tempter of evils: and he tempteth no man. But every man is tempted, being drawn away by his own concupiscence, and allured." (James 1: 13, 14.) To fathom God's holy intentions, as well as to

consider how we are to conduct ourselves when temptations assail us, is the purpose of this morning's instruction. I propose, then, to answer the following questions :

I. *Why does the Lord permit us to be attacked by so many temptations?* and

II. *Being attacked, how can we resist these numerous temptations?*

I. Temptations are the touchstone of our fidelity to God. Our life upon earth is merely a probation for our eternal life in heaven. Temptations are the plummet wherewith God sounds every side of our hearts in order to measure the depths of our love for him. Can we, then, wonder that the Lord permits us to be tempted in various and almost innumerable ways? We must be tested for eternal life and for the heaven that awaits us. Through the efforts of our own free will, must we be made worthy of the bliss of the Hereafter. God could, indeed, create us without our aid, but he cannot save us without our co-operation. Heaven and its felicity are not merely the free gift of divine love and mercy ; they are the reward of merit after the battle of life. Even those perfect spirits, the Angels of heaven, to whom the Lord granted the contemplation of the Beatific Vision from the moment of their creation, had to be proved and tried before they could be confirmed in glory,—so that that which had been given them as a free gift might become to them the merited reward of their free will. The obedience of Adam and Eve was tested in the Garden of Eden at the foot of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The Lord leads every human being to this same tree of the knowledge of good and evil, not only once, but time and again, until the great novitiate for eternal life is finished.

I. God has given us various powers and faculties, of body and soul, that all being tried and tested by temptation may be employed for his service. *Our eyes* must be tried in order to ascertain whether, being led astray by the deceitful phantoms of sin, they are directed to evil, rather than to the true and unchangeable goods of heaven. *Our ears* must be tested in order to know whether they are open to evil and eagerly listen to it, or, on the contrary, open to God and his holy word, and closed to sinful words and discourses. *Our tongue*, our *hands* and *feet*, and all the members and senses of our body must be tested, in order to find out whether they serve the world, rather than God. For the same purpose, God searches the various powers and faculties of the soul, in order to test their fidelity to him, and their real love for him. He tries our understanding, to see if in the holy obedience of faith it bows to the teachings of revelation or rather relies upon

its own narrow conceits. He searches our heart and our memory, the imagination and the will, and all the depths of our souls in order to discover whether we love him or adore another before him. He tries the king upon his throne, and the lowest beggar among his subjects; he tries the father and the mother, the son and daughter, the master and the servant, the rich and the poor,—everyone according to his calling and position in life, in order to test and to reward each man according to the depth of his love and the strength of his fidelity.

2. Temptations have a still wider range and purpose. The worth and greatness of our virtue lie in them. Without temptation, there is no virtue. A person may be innocent, but innocence is no virtue. Man becomes virtuous only by resisting temptations. There is as great a difference between innocence and virtue, as there is between life and strength,—a baby has life but no strength. There is no victory without battle. That only deserves the name of virtue which has been tried in the warfare against evil, and against the passions of the heart.

3. Every virtue is opposed by its contrary vice. Unbelief sends its doubts and objections into the soul of man in order to destroy or, at least, diminish the strength and zeal of faith. The spirit of impurity presents its sinful images before the chaste soul, and endeavors to cast the fires of sinful lust into its pure depths. Benevolence is opposed by avarice, humility and meekness are assailed by pride and hatred. As every being in nature has its enemy, every animal its adversary, every tree its worm, every flower and plant its dangerous and poisonous insect, so every virtue has a vice for its enemy, and the power of virtue must be tested by the conflict with its enemy. Only in heaven there is no conflict, no temptation.

4. When a nation enjoys a long-continued peace, and its army remains inactive for many years, the bravery of its soldiers and the skill of its generals can not be known or appreciated. But when the enemy approaches, and the troops are threatened on every side; when on the field of battle, bombs, bullets, and shots are flying right and left, when they fight man to man, the courage and bravery of the soldiers are tried, and the talent of their leaders manifested. If there were no temptation, there would be no true and perfect virtue. How beautifully this truth is exemplified in *Abraham*. That heroic servant of God was devoted in strong and living faith to the Lord who chose him to be the progenitor of a new race. But never in his life did his strong confidence in God's word and the sublime grandeur of his faith shine forth more brightly than when he stood upon Mount Moriah,

knife in hand, ready, at the divine command, to offer up his only son in sacrifice. Then the Lord said to him : " By my own self have I sworn, because thou hast done this thing, and hast not spared thy only begotten son for my sake : I will bless thee, and I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand that is by the sea-shore." (Gen. 22: 16,17.) *Joseph of Egypt* practised the virtue of chastity in his father's house, but his purity shines forth more resplendently before our eyes, when we see him fleeing from the wicked temptress, and cast into prison on account of his virtue. Should we have ever heard of the chastity of Susanna, if temptation had not revealed it to us ?

5. The more violent and protracted the temptation, the greater a person's virtue. Therefore, the Lord said to Peter: " Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." (Luke 22: 31.) He permitted the Apostles to fall into divers temptations and troubles that their virtue might shine forth more brilliantly to all succeeding generations. Thus, God leads us, my brethren, into conflict with temptation, that our virtue may come forth victorious. He tests the strength of our faith through scepticism and interior doubts, and through the examples of infidelity that surround us in the world. He tries the purity of our hearts by the impure and sinful desires which arise within us. He seeks to reveal in their full splendor our love for God and our neighbor through temptations to tepidity and idleness of heart, and through unkind thoughts against our brethren. Every temptation affords the Christian a fresh opportunity for the perfect practice of some beautiful virtue.

If the life of man according to the will of God, is a never-ending trial, an enduring temptation, his reward will be so much the greater, the more his fidelity and love are tried by the fiery ordeal. Innumerable are the consoling promises which God has made to those who resist temptations. " Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love him." (James 1: 12.) " My brethren, count it all joy, when you shall fall into divers temptations: knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience. And patience hath a perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, deficient in nothing." (James 1: 2-4.) " My dearest, think not strange the burning heat that is to try you, as if some new thing happened to you: but rejoice, being partakers of the sufferings of Christ, that when his glory shall be revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy." (1 Pet. 4: 12, 13.) " Now, no chastisement for the present seemeth to bring with it joy but sorrow; but afterwards, it will yield to them that are exercised by it, the most peaceable fruit of justice." (Hebr. 12: 11.) The kingdom of heaven must be won by hard fighting, for it suffers violence. The

heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God, will not descend from heaven to earth, in order to catch us up painlessly into its bright recesses, but with labor and toil and sweat we must ascend to it, and force an entrance into its pearly walls. "To him that overcometh," says Christ, "I will give the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth but he that receiveth it." (Apoc. 2: 17.)

II. I have said that only those who successfully stand the test of the great trial of life shall receive the crown of glory, hence, I ask myself that other question, *How shall we come forth victorious over temptation?*

1. We must walk at all times in *humility and in the fear of God.* "Let him that thinketh himself to stand, take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10: 12.) The weakness, frailty, and corruption of our nature are greater than we are aware of, and though we have overcome a temptation once, twice, yea, a hundred times, we must not presume on our success, for the tempter will repeat and renew his attack. Three times did he tempt Jesus in the desert, and each time he proposed to him a different temptation. He is a crafty and cunning adversary. He spies out our inclinations and wishes, and adroitly makes use of our habits and needs. He holds riches before the eyes of the poor man, and pictures to him the happiness to be found in their possession, so that, before long, the hand is stretched out to take the property of its neighbor. If he does not go that far, he, at least, looks discontentedly and enviously at his neighbor's goods, and murmurs at, or curses, his own lot. In the heart of the rich man, he awakens insatiable desires, he tries to lead him to pride and avarice, and to a sinful use of his wealth. In the heart of him who is inclined to sensuality, he excites impure thoughts, imaginations, and desires. For the irritable man he prepares the temptation to impatience, and stirs up anew the fire of hate in his heart. Others are tempted by the devil in a different manner, but he invariably seizes upon the weak side. Often he does not at once suggest any thing very wicked and sinful. He has obtained his object if the Christian relaxes some of his strictness, and gives in, ever so little, to his suggestions. He disguises himself as an angel of light, and represents evil under the appearance of good. Or, he places on the tongues of those who are sinfully inclined, excuses for evil. He calls out to them: "Once is no time." "It is not even a sin." "Others also do it." "The temptation is too vehement!" "What does it matter if you have sinned!" "You can confess your sins, and you will be all right!" and by such reasoning, he seeks to deceive the heart of man. He even quotes Scripture, (as he did to our Saviour), when it suits his purpose to make the evil and forbidden thing appear good and laudable.

Should we not, then, walk in the continual fear of God? "Watch ye and pray that you enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matt. 26: 41.) Should not our repeated relapses into past sins make us more cautious and fearful? Some of the greatest saints have fallen through the cunning of the wicked enemy of our souls. The cedars of Lebanon were cast down, and torn up by the roots in battle with the demon. All human virtue stands upon an unsteady foundation, and only the fear of God is able to preserve grace in our hearts for the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.

2. The pious Christian, although fearful in temptation, *must not, however, lose courage.* He will remember the words of the Lord: "In the world you shall have distress, but have confidence; I have overcome the world." (John 16: 33.) Through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the throne of the Prince of darkness has been shaken and overthrown; and Satan can no longer injure us. A residue of power is left to him, it is true, but no more than is necessary to test our fidelity and virtue. He dare not overstep the boundaries which have been marked out for him. God will not permit us to be tempted above our strength. Even the strongest and most lasting temptation is appointed by him for the salvation of our souls.

Rain and sunshine, storms and gentle breezes, winter and summer are necessary for the life of nature, and the prosperity of all created beings; and only by these alternations, a strong and healthy life is developed upon the face of the earth. In like manner, temptations are necessary in the spiritual life; and the Lord sends as many trials and temptations to each one, as is useful and salutary for his soul. But although we must live in the continual fear of God, yet we have no reason to despond or be disheartened. The divine wisdom and love have fixed the measure of temptations for us, in order that through peace and war, through rain and sunshine, through joys and sorrows, he may lead us to the heavenly felicity.

Remember, too, that our good God has given us all the necessary weapons whereby we may overcome our temptations. A general refuses to lead his soldiers to battle, if they are not well armed and equipped, and enabled to fight with success. Jesus Christ who went forth in the armor of his holy humanity to fight and conquer the Evil One, has left us his weapons, so that we, in our turn, may not be overcome in the warfare. His all-powerful grace by which we can do all things, supports us in the strife; he himself takes part in the battle; he is with us when the enemy attacks us, and he fights with and for us. If we should be tempted *above our strength*, we shall conquer *in his might.*

With the shepherd boy David, then, we must go forth in the name of the Lord, and the wicked enemy with all his temptations will fall powerless before us. What we cannot do of ourselves, we can do in him who strengthens us. Supported by him, we can overcome every temptation ; and every victory we gain over the devil, will add a new brightness to our crown of heavenly glory.

3. But although through the gracious assistance of God, we are strengthened and enabled to come forth victorious from every temptation, we are strictly bound, nevertheless, *to avoid the dangerous occasions of sin*. "Seek the Lord in simplicity of heart : for he is found by them that tempt him not, and he sheweth himself to them that have faith in him." (Wisd. 1: 2.) "He that loveth danger shall perish in it." (Eccl. 3: 27.) Our Saviour himself admonishes us to pray to his heavenly Father : "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." (Matt. 6: 13.) We may, indeed, expect with firm confidence that the Almighty will be a helper and deliverer to us in every temptation, but shall we dare to implore his help, if we wilfully place ourselves in the danger of sin ? Will the Lord grant us his assistance in such a case ? Would you cast yourself into the fire, in the hope that God might rescue you ? If you do not avoid dangerous companionship, if you deliberately return to a place in which you have repeatedly fallen into sin, you must not be astonished, if the grace of God forsakes you and the temptation overcomes you. God helps only those who strive to co-operate with, and make themselves worthy of, his grace. He who knowing the weakness of his heart, yet rushes anew into fresh dangers, is not worthy of the help of God.

4. Moreover, he who wishes to overcome temptations must carefully avoid the *beginning*, or the *first step in sin*. A Christian hardly ever falls at once into the depth of vice, or by one misstep sinks into the abyss of wickedness and iniquity ; the descent into sin is generally gradual. The sinful thought arises gently and almost imperceptibly in the soul. Like a spark of fire, it seeks for fuel ; and if it be not extinguished at once, it grows ere long into a lively imagination. The imagination begets the desire, and the desire becomes stronger and more vehement each moment ; and then, from a vehement desire to an evil action is a very short step. When the first step is once taken, the second and the third follow in quick succession ; and finally, the sinner descends, step by step, into the deepest abyss of vice.

5. The flight from dangerous occasions, and the guarding against the beginning of sin, are especially necessary in temptations against holy purity. In common warfare he who flees before the enemy is accounted

a coward ; but in temptations of the flesh, Christian heroism is shown not by meeting and fighting with, but by running away from, the foe. He who is not ready to practise this heroism will be overcome by the tempter.

6. Finally, I would add one more remedy to the foregoing ones, which will strengthen us in our warfare with temptations. If you wish to come forth victorious, you must make use of the means of grace which God has placed within your reach, and which are at your disposal. These means are *Prayer* and the *Holy Sacraments*. Through prayer and the reception of the holy Sacraments, the Christian really becomes invincible. Prayer obtains for us the help of God, and supported by his almighty grace, we are, so to say, almighty, and can do what we please according to these words of St Paul : “I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me.” (Phil. 4: 13.)

The strength and support which are granted to us through prayer, will be increased and confirmed by the reception of the holy Sacraments of Penance and the Blessed Eucharist. The Sacrament of Penance breaks down the power of Satan in our hearts, and cleanses us from all sin. The Sacrament of the Altar makes us invincible. “If God be for us, who is against us ?” (Rom. 8: 31.) The Lion of the tribe of Juda, the strong and mighty God who first overcame the temptations of the old serpent, will fight in us and through us ; for he will effect and perform in us that which we cannot accomplish by our own strength. If in every temptation, we cry to heaven in fervent prayer, and frequently receive the God of grace and of strength, the victory shall assuredly be ours.

As Jesus after being baptized by John in the river Jordan was led by the spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil, so from our coming into the world until our going out of it, we shall be tempted and sorely tried by the same evil spirit, who, not content with being miserable himself, desires to make all others miserable as well. But we have a Saviour God, Jesus Christ, to him we must lift up our eyes and hearts in every temptation. With courage, then, let us struggle and fight, as he has done, that when our great trial, our novitiate for heaven, is finished, the Angels of God may come to meet us in order to conduct us, crowned, into the mansions of eternal bliss. Amen.

BISHOP EHRLER.

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT.

TRUE HAPPINESS IN THIS WORLD.

“Lord, it is good for us to be here : if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles.” (Matth. 17 : 4.)

“Jesus taketh unto him Peter, and James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart. And he was transfigured before them. And his face did shine as the sun : and his garments became white as snow.” This foretaste of the joys of heaven, was designed by Jesus to inspire his disciples with a contempt of earthly goods. Peter, in fact, was so transported with joy that he knew not what to say. Full of rapture, he cried out: “Lord, it is good for us to be here : let us make here three tabernacles.” He believed that the time had come when our Saviour would “reform the body of our lowness, made like to the body of his glory.” (Philip. 3: 21.) But no ; the tabernacles of Mount Thabor were not to be set up for fixed abodes, but only for temporary resting-places. Let us, to-day, like the Apostles, ascend the mountain in company with our Saviour ; that is to say, let us raise ourselves in spirit above all temporal concerns. Let us there erect three tabernacles,

I. *Of Faith* ;

II. *Of Hope* ; and

III. *Of Charity*.

And thus, even in this world, in every circumstance of life, whether joyful or sad, we shall be happy.

I. *Faith* teaches us that

1. *To despise earthly* ; and

2. *To fix our hearts upon heavenly things*, is very conducive to our happiness.

1. A Christian whose mind is elevated above the so-called honors, riches, and pleasures of this world, understands full well, that all these earthly goods are only vanity, and that they contribute nothing to true happiness. He also knows that he has but a short time to spend upon earth ; for, “here we have no permanent city,” (Hebr. 13: 14,) and, consequently, he is not tormented by that disquietude which the children of this world suffer from their passions. Neither envy, avarice, ambition, nor any other vice troubles him.

2. His heavenly home is always before his eyes, and he lives like a traveller in an inn. The earth affords him shelter, but it is not his fixed abode. St. Bernard compares the just of this world to soldiers who are always engaged either in battle or labor, and who live in the flesh as in tents. "A tent," he says further, "has, it is true, a roof, but no foundation, and it is easily moved from place to place. The Just seek not a foundation in the present, but in the future: they seek a city whose foundation is on high; for faith, which is their foundation, is not established upon temporal goods but upon the Lord."

I. *Hope* shows us

1. *That the reward of this world is very small and uncertain; and*
2. *That God's reward is very great and certain.*

1. The world can bestow upon its servants only that which it is in itself; what is the world? It is vanity. "Vanity of vanities, and all things are vanity." (Eccles. 12: 7.) "The world passeth away, and the concupiscence thereof" (1 John 2: 16); and no matter how hard its votaries may labor, "they receive only a corruptible crown." (1 Cor. 9: 25.) Its reward ends with their life. But, it is still more distressing to consider the uncertainty of this reward; for, how many are there, who labor assiduously, and still receive no earthly recompense! Either the master whom they serve does not, or will not recognize their service, or they are deprived of their reward through the jealousy of their fellow-servants, who deceive their master in every possible way, and still are richly rewarded by him.

2. On the other hand, the reward of the just is very great, yes, superabounding. "Their hope is full of immortality." (Wis. 3: 4.) Their "reward is great in heaven." (Luke 6: 23.) "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house." (Ps. 35: 9.) No further arguments are necessary. God himself has said to those that serve him: "I am thy protector, and thy reward exceeding great." (Gen. 15: 1.) This reward is as sure as that God is true to his promises. The Apostle says of himself: "For I know whom I have believed." (2 Tim. 1: 12.) "I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. For the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just judge, will render to me." (2 Tim. 4: 7, 8.) This it is, which comforts the Christian soul in all the miseries of this life.

III. *It is charity which*

1. *Makes our happiness perfect, as far as it can be perfect, in this world; and*

2. *Gives us a certain assurance of eternal happiness in the next.*

1. He that truly loves God, enjoys in him all pleasures and joys which can be found in all other objects. St. Francis exclaimed : " My God and my all ! " The satisfaction which all creatures afford us is in God and from God. This is the happiness which God has promised to those that love him : " He that loveth me, shall be loved by my Father ; and I will love him." (John 14 : 21.) What does he mean by this sentence : " I will love him ? " I will glorify myself before him even in this world as I did to the Apostles in the Transfiguration ; I will allow him to feel all the joy experienced by those chosen souls. " I will show him every good, I will show him myself," as St. Augustine beautifully observes. Truly, a great promise, a generous reward ! God promises to you no other reward than himself. Oh, ye avaricious ones ! is this promise of our Saviour not comprehensive enough ? You seem to be rich, but if you do not possess God, what have you ? Wretched men ! a beggar who possesses God is richer than you are !

2. He who really loves God is secure of his eternal happiness ; for he can say with the Apostle : " Who shall separate me from the love of God ? " (Rom. 8 : 35.) No one, unless he himself wills it. Neither sorrow nor distress ; neither hunger nor nakedness ; neither dangers nor persecutions, not even the sword, can divide us from him. " But in all these things we overcome, because of him that hath loved us." (Rom. 8 : 37.) St. Bernard says : " I fear not, because I love ; if I did not love, I should then have ample cause for fear." This happiness is a foretaste and beginning of everlasting felicity, and what more could we desire in this world ?

Is it not true, dearly beloved, that it is good for us to be here in these tabernacles of faith, hope, and charity ? Death will make this happiness perfect and eternal. For, as the Apostles fell upon their faces when they saw Jesus in the glory of his transfiguration, so we must fall into the dust of death before we can be perfectly happy. Again, the rising up of Peter, James, and John at the command of Jesus, prefigures our resurrection. From that time forward there was no Mosaic law and no prophecies ; therefore, Moses and Elias disappeared ; but, " in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." There remains only that God should be to us all in all, who is ever ready to fulfil all that he has promised to those that love him. Amen.

B.

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT.

NECESSITY OF DOING PENANCE.

“ Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish.” (Luke 13: 3.)

When the patriarchs and preachers of the Old Law wished to move their hearers to repentance, instead of words, they made use thereto of some extraordinary means. Some of them bound themselves with chains,—others girded their loins with sack-cloth and put ashes on their heads, uttering, at the same time, the most lamentable cries to excite the multitude to sympathy and sorrow. The sight of their exterior mortifications, they regarded as more forcible and effectual in moving the obdurate hearts of sinners, than the mere use of words. Nevertheless, I shall endeavor, to-day, by means of the tongue to excite you to compunction and repentance. But, well aware that my own words alone are inadequate to effect this, I shall call to my assistance the threatening words of Jesus Christ as expressed in my text : “ Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish.” Hard and insensible must be the heart which is not alarmed or moved by these words ! God gave unto man two planks of rescue when shipwrecked by sin on the boisterous sea of this world—*Baptism* and *Penance*. To the one who has never forfeited his baptismal innocence, the first plank will suffice to convey him safely to the haven of glory ; but whoever has stained with mortal sin his baptismal garment of sanctifying grace, has no other alternative save *Penance* to preserve him from eternal damnation. Hence, I shall speak to you to-day :

I. *On Penance as necessary for those who have fallen into mortal sin after Baptism ; and*

II. *On Penance as most powerful and beneficial for all Christians.*

I. When the body is stricken with disease, it is not benefited by any kind of nourishment. In like manner, if the soul is diseased with the deadly malady of sin, without penance, there are no good works or virtues that can prove beneficial to it for the obtaining of life-everlasting. Alas ! in how many ways are we continually drawn to sin, by the *suggestions of the devil, by the allurements of the world, and by the corruption of the flesh !* Penance is the only remedy for all this. And yet sinners, crediting this truth, not only continue to commit sin, but, what is still more astonishing, remain obstinate in their guilt. It is to

be feared that it is *want of faith* which thus makes them *audacious in committing sin, and slothful in doing penance.*

1. The same Lord and Saviour who tells us there is no salvation *without faith*, tells us that we will all be lost *without penance*. “ Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish.” He does not say, unless you do penance, you will be unfortunate in this life; or you will go to Purgatory; or you will not obtain as great a share of eternal glory as other Christians. This is what he says: Unless you do penance, you are not even worthy to go to Purgatory; hell must be your everlasting abode of unspeakable torments. God gave a special command to John the Baptist when he came from the desert, to *preach penance* to the people. Hence, his continual exhortation to them was: “ *Do penance, for the kingdom of God is at hand.*” (Matt. 3: 2.) Our Lord Jesus Christ, in his turn, preached penance to the multitude. He did not fear that they might murmur, saying: “ Why does this man choose for his sermons the same subject which the Baptist made use of? This is no novelty to us; we are weary of listening to it!” No, no; this divine Preacher regarded more the importance of the matter than the vain fancies or complaints of his hearers. He charged his Apostles to preach the same sublime theme to the whole world. “ What shall we do?” said the people to St. Peter, after he had preached his first sermon on Pentecost. “ *Do penance,*” was his answer. That was the conclusion of his sermon. It was in the same manner that St. Paul finished his discourse with the heathen philosophers at Athens, in order to let them know that their great erudition availed them nothing without a knowledge of penance. Any person who has renounced God by committing sin has no other way by which to return to him than that of penance, and if he take any other it will but lead him to destruction.

2. Sin can be remitted without holy Communion; it can be washed away without absolution, and, in cases of necessity, without any Sacrament whatever; but a mortal sin never was and never shall be remitted without penance. Suppose yourself on your death-bed and no priest to be had to give you absolution, or administer to you the last Sacraments. In such circumstances, if you fervently call upon God with your whole heart, repenting of your sins for the love of God, and earnestly desiring to receive the Sacraments, you will obtain the divine pardon, and in case of death, be happy and blessed for all eternity.

3. There was a holy hermit named Macarius, who dwelt in the wilderness. He promised his brethren that on a certain day he would preach them a sermon. At the time and place appointed, without

uttering a word, the holy man began to shed tears in abundance. When he saw that they were surprised at his thus continuing to weep in silence, he at length said to them : “ Let us now repent, my brethren, let us constantly bewail our sins lest we should lament them in vain for all eternity ! ” Do not doubt that those people shed torrents of tears on hearing these words.

4. We read in the book of Jonas, that God gave that prophet a command to go and preach to the people of Nineveh. But what think you, was his sermon to those idolaters ? It was indeed a short one. “ Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed,” (Jon. 3 : 44)—this was all he said. Entering into that great city a perfect stranger, Jonas worked no miracle, and gave no proof of his divine mission. He came to preach to Pagans, who might fitly have answered that they had no knowledge of the great God who had sent him. Ah, no ; as soon as the Ninevites heard the words : “ Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be destroyed,” they were immediately struck with fear of the unknown God who spoke to them through his prophet. The very king himself, hearing the warning cry of Jonas, descended at once from his throne, threw off his royal robes, and, (as the Scripture says), called aloud on God. He gave general orders to his subjects to do penance. All fasted, both prince and people, and even the cattle were deprived of their fodder. The Ninevites put on sack-cloth, and not content with all this, they exclaimed : “ Who can tell if God will turn and forgive ; and will turn away from his fierce anger, and we shall not perish ? ” (Jon. 3: 9.)

Reflect, my dearly beloved, upon the tribulation and consternation which reigned supreme throughout that entire town ! The groans of the people ; the clamor of the children and cattle crying alike for food ; noblemen mortifying their flesh with coarse hair-cloth and fasting—such was the repentance of the Ninevites, which was so acceptable before God that he withheld his avenging arm, and withdrew the terrible chastisements intended for them. Suppose that I, standing here in this pulpit this morning, should cry out to you in the name of God : “ Yet forty days, and your city, and all it contains shall be destroyed ! ” Would you repent at once and do penance as the Ninevites did ? Let your own consciences, answer this question. How often have preachers exhorted you from the pulpit—how often have confessors admonished you in the holy tribunal, you, O, libertine, you, O, blasphemer, you, O drunkard, you, O unjust, covetous, unfaithful, adulterous Christian—how often have they declared to all addicted to any habitual mortal sin that if they did not renounce their vices and reform their lives, they would be condemned to everlasting perdition !

Yet, after all these threats and warnings from God, you only redouble your crimes and heap sin upon sin.

5. *Do penance—do penance!* that is my sermon, that is my message to-day. By the command and the authority of the same God who commanded Jonas to preach to Nineveh, I stand here before you this morning. You have heard of the Ninevites' conversion, but where is *your* repentance? Where are *your* tears; where *your* contrition—*your* acts of mortification? God gave the Ninevites forty days wherein to do penance, but I cannot promise you a single day or hour. Before this week is out you, I, any one of us, may become the food of worms and maggots. Hence, do not delay your repentance. More than a week of our forty days, of our holy season of Lent is already gone. If you have hitherto deferred to do so, return now in earnest to God, with humility and real contrition of heart, and the happy fate of the Ninevites will surely be yours.

II. And what do the great penitents of the world declare of the sweet-ness and inestimable benefits of penance?

1. Ask *David* the king,—he will tell you that penance saved him from hell; that his contrite tears and sighs healed his soul of the deadly wounds inflicted on it by his crimes of murder and adultery; and made it—odious and filthy as it was—beautiful, pure, and glorious in the sight of God. Ask *Mary Magdalene*,—and she will tell you that penance banished from her soul the seven devils that possessed it; that it exalted her to Paradise after all the excesses of her scandalous life. The abundant tears of repentance wherewith she bathed the feet of Jesus, at the same time washed her soul from every stain of sin. Through shame and remorse, repentance and sorrow, the Apostle *Peter*, also, made his peace with Jesus, after having openly denied him thrice. True repentance would have obtained pardon even for *Judas* himself.

2. In the person of *Ezechias*, God gives us an example of how penance overcomes the divine justice, and protects the sinner from the divine judgment. God sent a mortal sickness upon *Ezechias* in punishment of his sins. He sent to him the prophet *Isaiah*, warning him to set his worldly affairs in order, for death was close at hand. What did the affrighted king do? Think you it was possible for him to escape after God had pronounced sentence of death upon him? Listen, and you shall hear. As soon as he received the awful tidings, *Ezechias* immediately put on the armor of penance. Begging pardon of God, he struck his breast and shed bitter tears for having sinned

against his Lord and Master ; and behold ! the prophet was straight-way commanded to return unto him with the glad announcement that his self-inflicted penance had made his peace with God, and that, instead of permitting him to die, God would restore him to health, and even prolong his life for fifteen additional years.

3. The Christian should weep for nothing except *Sin*. The tears of penance alone should flow from his eyes. One might think that the best excuse for tears would be the Passion and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet the Son of God reproved the women of Jerusalem for weeping over him as he bore the heavy burden of the cross to Mount Calvary,—saying to them : “Weep not over me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children” (Luke 23 : 28) ; weep for your sins which have laid upon me the cruel weight of the Cross, and which are about to nail me to its ignominious wood ! Ah ! what will Christ say to those who weep bitterly over every little earthly trial or deprivation, and have no tears to shed for the loss of divine grace by sin, for the forfeiting of their portion in the everlasting Paradise ? Alas ! he who weeps not now for his sins, when he has time, shall vainly weep and bewail in hell for all eternity !

My dearly beloved, behold the rugged path of penance, which, (if you have lost baptismal innocence), can alone conduct you to the joys of God’s eternal kingdom ! Enter then with joy upon that blessed road,—“the royal highway of the Cross,” as devout A. Kempis calls it. Heal therein the deadly wounds of your souls. Joining the long procession of pious penitents who journey toward the New Jerusalem, strike your breasts, shed copious tears, and cultivate an abiding sorrow for having ever offended the divine majesty. If you do this from your hearts, with a firm purpose of amendment, you shall obtain of God the consolation of divine grace in this life, and enter with all the holy pilgrims of penance into the eternal glory of the next. Amen.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT.

DETRACTION AND CALUMNY.

“But some of them said: He casteth out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of devils.” (Luke 11: 15.)

The miracles of our Saviour produced two different and contradictory effects in the minds of the spectators. Through them, a portion came to the knowledge of faith; while to the Scribes and Pharisees, on the contrary, they were an occasion for attacking our Saviour in his actions, in his person, and in his disciples. Who can hope to escape the tongues of calumniators, when the Redeemer of the world himself was made to suffer from them? What walk in life can avoid criticism, when the highest sanctity, the most stupendous miracles and the greatest benefits did not escape censure? Allow me, to-day, to point out to you the turpitude of the sins of detraction and calumny. If you clearly comprehend my arguments, you will be obliged to acknowledge

- I. *That they are very wicked; and*
- II. *That they are very dangerous.*

I. The malice of the detractor consists principally in these two points :

1. *That he sees nothing but evil in his neighbor; and*
2. *That he misinterprets even the good in him.*

1. As insects attack the sore places, so the detractor entertains himself with the faults of his neighbors. “A perverted eye,” says St. Basil, “does not see many things which, indeed, exist, and suspects many which have no existence.” What right has a sinner to sit in judgment upon his fellow-sinner and to pass sentence upon him,—to assume an office which belongs to God alone? On this account “Detractors are hateful to God,” (Rom. 1: 30,) and he pursues them far more than other sinners because they are more wicked. The Lord, by the Psalmist, says: “The man that in private detracted his neighbor, him did I persecute.” (Ps. 100: 5.)
2. The Gospel of to-day shows us plainly the malice of *calumny*. The Pharisees through malice laid various plans to ensnare Jesus in his

speech, thus seeking something blameworthy in his conduct. But, as they could find nothing censurable, they put an evil interpretation upon the good that he performed. His holy deeds must be made to appear wicked. They taunted him as a disturber of the peace, an enemy of the law and of Cæsar. His miracles they ascribed to magic ; and, when he drove out a devil, they said he did it by the power of a more wicked devil. That which the Pharisees did to Christ, we do to our neighbor. What is the aim of the calumniator, but that he whom he seeks to rob of his honor, be dishonored with others ? If he cannot gain this point by the telling of the real faults of his neighbor, he will not stop at lies. This, alone, proves the greatness and malice of this vice.

II. Let us now consider *how dangerous is this vice*, which is

1. *So easily committed* ; and
2. *So difficult of reparation.*

1. The more nimble and ungoverned is the tongue, so much the more easy is it to commit this sin. David says : " My tongue is the pen of a scrivener that writeth swiftly." (Ps. 44 : 2.) He that writes swiftly, does not write carefully, and, generally, makes many mistakes. He that is loquacious, mostly fails in prudence. And what is his principal subject of attack ? Chiefly, the honor and good name of his neighbor. Is this a thing of no importance ? The Wise Man says : " A good name is better than great riches." (Prov. 22 : 1.) As an arrow is swift and deadly, so, also, is the tongue of the calumniator. He even makes a jest of the most wicked calumnies. Hear what Holy Writ says upon this point : " As he is guilty that shooteth arrows and lances unto death : so is the man, that hurteth his friend deceitfully : and when he is taken, saith, I did it in jest." (Prov. 26 : 18.) Oh, wicked excuse ! What difference does it make to a man that has been stabbed, whether his assailant has killed him in anger or in jest ? Miserable pretence of Christianity, when such a gross violation of charity passes for a joke !

2. " Nevertheless, there are very few who perfectly correct themselves of this vice," says St. Jerome. It is rare to find a man whose conduct is so blameless, as to be blind to the faults of his neighbor. We are so much given to censoriousness, that even pious people can hardly cure themselves of this vice. But the cause of this is plain to be seen. Often a man will not consider as a sin the circulation of the most injurious reports against a neighbor ; he will even produce them under the disguise of a virtuous action. St. Bernard says : " A man

relates the faults of his neighbor with a sigh, as though he revealed these things more from compassion than from ill-will. ‘I pity the good man,’ he says, ‘I love him, I would rather not have revealed this thing; but, I am sorry that I can no longer conceal it. He is in other respects an upright man; but, to tell the truth, in this matter, he is not to be excused.’” That which makes this conduct still more ridiculous and foolish is when a man invests his detraction or calumny with an air of secrecy; he will beg his hearers not to repeat what he has told them; thus confessing that he himself should not have made the matter public.

My dear brethren, we now see that this vice is wide-spread as it is wicked and dangerous. Are we not moved by these forcible considerations? Ah! let us firmly resolve to guard ourselves carefully against these sins, so prevalent all over the globe, to which the corruption of our nature so easily inclines us; and which, committed with ease, are very difficult of reparation. Let us rather cover our neighbor’s faults with the mantle of charity, than injure him, and, at the same time, ruin our own souls, by revealing his sins. “Hast thou heard a word against thy neighbor? let it die within thee, trusting that it will not burst thee” (Ecclus. 19: 10); and thus thou shalt have a quiet conscience and a happy end. If we are bound in Christian charity to hide the real faults of our neighbor, how much more are we forbidden to accuse him of imaginary sins, by telling falsehoods of him! “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor,” says the Lord thy God. Woe to him who scorns and violates the divine command!

B.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT.

THE EVIL OF CONCEALING SINS IN CONFESSION.

“He was casting out a devil, and the same was dumb.” (Luke 11:14.)

What a consoling spectacle, my dear brethren, do we not behold in the Catholic church every year at Easter-time. All Catholics worthy of the name and solicitous for the salvation of their souls, approach during that holy season the sacred tribunal of Penance, in order to make an avowal of their sins, and secure their peace with God. I call it a consoling spectacle, and justly. For can there be any thing more consoling than the sight of that vast concourse of penitents—men, women, and children, kings and queens, bishops and priests, the most learned and the most ignorant, people of every color, state, and profession of life,—spontaneously confessing their sins to the minister of Christ, in order to receive the holy absolution. This is the great triumph of the Church over the minds of men ; and the clearest proof that Confession is a divine institution. A human invention could never accomplish such results, especially with those who are otherwise intractable and inattentive even to the voice of the Church. What happy consequences these Easter-Confessions produce, is, at present, known to God alone, and will be made fully manifest to us only on the day of judgment. *Then*, my dear brethren, we shall perceive how many guilty consciences have recovered their last purity by the holy Easter-Confession—how many dissensions have been settled, how many injuries repaired, how many grievous sins forgiven, and abominable vices abandoned. Every year, the season of spring works a mighty revolution in nature, and fills every creature with new life and joy. Easter-tide is the spring-time of the soul, its period of spiritual resolution and reanimation. But let us not deceive ourselves, my brethren, by appearances, no matter how edifying. Among those, who, then, annually go to confession, there are many in whom the reception of the Sacrament seems to produce no amendment of life whatever. If we ask for the reason of this, we shall find, alas, it is because these unhappy people make guilty, sacrilegious confessions, not declaring but concealing certain sins in confession. Like the poor man in to-day’s Gospel, they are possessed with a dumb devil, who closes their mouth in the sacred tribunal, so that when they should speak, they are silent. It is, indeed, one of the strangest phenomena in the whole spiritual life, that men spontaneously enter the confessional to confess their sins, and, instead of confessing, conceal them.

This is downright madness. I cannot explain this enigma to myself, except that they do so

- I. *Out of shame*; or
- II. *Out of hard-heartedness*.

1. Many, especially young people, conceal their sins in confession *out of shame*. It is related of Socrates that, on a certain occasion, he saw one of his young pupils, coming out of a house of ill-fame. The young man quickly espied his teacher, and forthwith retraced his steps to the house, thinking that Socrates had not observed him. But Socrates pursued him into that den of iniquity, and taking him by the hand said: “My son, instead of being ashamed to be seen leaving this house, you should be ashamed at ever having entered it!” How many resemble this young man! They were not ashamed to load their consciences with many abominable crimes, but they are ashamed to acknowledge their guilt in confession. Hear what St. Chrysostom says: “The shame which should attend the sinner at the commission of sin, the devil steals from him, but as soon as the sin is committed, and should be confessed, the enemy returns him his lost shame in double measure.”

Thus, the man or woman who committed sin without a blush, is ashamed to confess it when obliged to do so. This singular inconsistency, alas! causes the eternal ruin of innumerable souls! They were not ashamed, my brethren, to deny their faith, to ridicule holy things; without regard to their honor or their good name, they continued a criminal line of conduct for years and years, they defiled their hands with injustice—fostering hatred in their hearts and bitterness in their mouths; they lived in open enmity with their fellow-men—yet, now, knowing and recognizing their sins and going into the tribunal of penance in order to confess them and to receive their forgiveness, their tongues are, as it were, palsied by false shame, they are dumb before the anointed minister of Christ. O, that some interior voice would cry out to them at that moment as Socrates did to his abashed disciple: “*Be not ashamed to confess and abandon your sins, since, in the first place, you were not ashamed to commit them!*” It is, indeed, true that sin produces shame and confusion, that its avowal causes us to blush. He is not truly penitent who has not this shame, and he justly deserves the reproach given by God to the impenitent sinner: “Thou hast a harlot’s forehead, thou wouldst not blush.” (Jer. 3: 3.) Woe to the man who has not this shame—who, with a brazen effrontery plunges into sin in open defiance of faith and morality! In such a one, the last spark of Christian feeling seems to have died out; he is a devil in human flesh. Yet, on the other hand, woe to the man who out of

shame makes an unworthy confession ! He changes the sentence of absolution into a sentence of condemnation; instead of a blessing, he merits the curse of God ; instead of obtaining the forgiveness of his sins, he adds to his other crimes the guilt of sacrilege, the profanation of the Holy Sacrament of Penance. Let all penitents about to confess their sins, remember the words of the Sacred Scripture : "Be not ashamed to confess thy sins." (Ecclus. 4: 31.) Let them remember what St. John says : "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity." (1 John 1: 9.) As Cain was not forgiven his fratricide, because he was ashamed or afraid to acknowledge his guilt in the presence of God, so a Catholic who is ashamed to confess his sins, will not obtain their pardon. Like Cain, he will wander about, finding neither rest nor peace for his soul, because a false shame has closed his mouth and hindered him from confessing his sins.

2. If we desire to make a good confession, we must prepare ourselves for it. This preparation demands that we implore the Holy Ghost to enlighten and assist us in the examination of our conscience. We must leave no corner, no recess of the conscience without a thorough examination ; we must not do it hurriedly, but take the necessary time and pains ; we must search into every grievous thought, recall every idle word, and take ourselves to task for every sinful action, for only in such a way can we prepare for a good confession. Now, many persons approach the sacred tribunal of Penance without this sincere examination of conscience. They have been for a year or more without going to confession ; and during that time, they have not led a very good life. Now, feeling their iniquities a grievous burden on their souls, they resolve to make their Easter duty. After a momentary examination of conscience which leaves undiscovered a large number, perhaps, of their mortal sins—they go to confession. In a few moments, with a flying act of contrition, and little or no purpose of amendment, this holy and important business is done and settled for another twelve months or more. Is there any sincerity in such a confession ? No ; where there is no honest and thorough preparation, there is no sincerity, and, consequently, no fruit.

3. Others are not careful in confession, because they do not rightly understand the importance of the Sacrament. They look upon the Easter Confession as an intolerable burden or duty, from which they can not free themselves, so long as they lay claim to the name of Catholic. Hence, every year they attempt to comply with this (to them) repulsive duty ; but they do not reflect that by confession they should be transformed into new men ; they forget that confession, to be of profit

to them, should give them a clear insight into their interior. Thus it comes that, failing to recognize the importance of the affair, they become liars in the sacred Tribunal. Committing the greatest sins, they were accustomed to say : "This does not signify much—" and so, blinded to their enormity, in the hour of confession, they pass over the most grievous crimes without mentioning them at all. Not only will a man refuse to confess a sin which he considers of little or no importance, but he will not be sorry for it, and failing to be sorry, he will take no pains to avoid it. Hence it comes to pass that men who are indeed grievous sinners, make an annual confession in which they accuse themselves only of a few peccadillos, as, for instance, that they have told a few lies, cursed sometimes, but not very often, that they neglected their morning and evening prayers, and so on, leaving unconfessed the grave catalogue of mortal sins which, like the handwriting on the wall at Belshazzar's feast, is the sure guarantee of their eternal destruction. As a matter of course, no amendment of life will follow such confessions ; for where knowledge is wanting, good will is wanting as well. The first step to an amendment of life is a knowledge of the fault, a knowledge which careless people do not possess nor care to possess.

II. Again, my dear brethren, many confess *without sincerity and out of hard-heartedness.*

1. Who would think it possible that Christians could be found so lost to every sense of religion as to purposely abuse and profane the holy Sacraments ? And, yet, such is the fact. Every year certain sinners go to confession, of their own free will, and whilst conscious of grievous sins upon their souls, wilfully conceal them in confession. With what a terrible crime do such people burden their consciences ! Their habitual guilt is increased by the still more awful sin of sacrilege—like Ananias and Sapphira, they tell a lie not to man, but to the Holy Ghost. Although God may not punish them with sudden death, as he did in the case of the unhappy couple mentioned in the Acts (5: 5,10) they carry death in their hearts without hope of being freed from its destroying dart—since such people generally persevere in their sins to the end of their lives. They are possessed by a dumb devil whose invincible power they blindly obey. By a bad confession, they sell themselves, as it were, to Satan, and, afterward, they can not break the strong, infernal chains by which he holds them captive.

2. Strange things, my brethren, shall come to light on the Last Day. There are many persons who lead bad lives, who commit mortal sins, yet who come to confession without accusing themselves of them by a

single word—nay, who deny every thing, if they are questioned in regard to certain sins ; and who, (if you take their own word for it,) have not even in thought sinned against purity. And after such a lying confession, they go to Communion ! O, my brethren, that is the most terrible sacrilege of all ! It is the treason of Judas, who sat at table with Jesus and partook of the Last Supper of the Blessed Eucharist, and immediately went forth and sold his Lord and Master for thirty pieces of silver. Yes, it is an act of malice, an act of enormous malice, to go to confession and conceal a mortal sin therein—a malice which draws down this most dreadful judgment upon the unhappy sinner : *An uneasy conscience here, and hell-fire eternally hereafter.* Whoever is disposed to commit such a crime, my brethren, whoever will not accuse himself of all his sins with candor and sincerity, but deliberately purposed to conceal them in confession, let him not dare to approach the sacred Tribunal where Christ sits in the person of his anointed minister.

As you love your own souls, dear Christians, be candid and sincere in your confessions ; examine your consciences thoroughly and humbly in advance ; and afterward, at the feet of your ghostly Father, accuse yourselves as you know yourselves to be guilty before heaven. If you should even succeed in hiding your sins from man, you can not hide them from God. Let every one who approaches the sacred tribunal of Penance lay well to heart the advice of the Holy Ghost : “ He that hideth his sins shall not prosper, but he that shall confess and forsake them shall obtain mercy.” (Pro. 28 : 13). And so laying bare your whole souls, my brethren, like little children, to the priest of God, and receiving from him the holy absolution, your Easter Confession and Communion will be to you the happy pledge not only of true peace and joy here below, but of a glorious Resurrection, and a blissful eternity with our divine Lord in the kingdom which he has purchased for us at the price of his most precious Blood. Amen.

O. S. B.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT.

THE NOTHINGNESS OF TEMPORAL GOODS.

“Where shall we buy bread that these may eat?” (John 6:5.)

These words our Saviour addressed to Philip, not because he was in doubt ; “ for he himself knew what he would do,” but in order, as the Gospel says, “ to try him,” to find out how far his disciple had advanced in evangelical perfection. Philip does not seem as yet to have advanced very far in spirituality, or he would have made answer : Lord, thou art all-powerful, thou feedest all the birds of the air, “ thou fillest with blessing every living creature,” (Ps. 144:16,) how much more art thou able to feed these few people ! In reality he rather incredulously answered : “ Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one may take a little.” His reply betrayed as well a mind too deeply engrossed in temporal concerns. He appeared more anxious for the food of the body, than for the propagation of the Gospel. In short, he was disposed, like many among us, to care more for earthly than for heavenly things. Allow me, to-day, to show you the true properties of temporal possessions. The great St. Bernard, descanting upon them, declares that

- I. *They are a burden to us, if we possess them ;*
- II. *They soil our consciences, if we love them ; and*
- III. *They make us sad, if we lose them.*

I can not understand how a reasonable man, who considers these three points, can care more for temporal than for eternal goods.

i. Temporal possessions cause us

1. *Many cares ; and*
2. *Useless cares.*

i. An anxious father of a family, “ whose wife is as a fruitful vine, and whose children sit around his table as olive plants,” (Ps. 127:3,) is often obliged to think within himself : “ Whence shall I get bread, that these may eat ? ” Perhaps at that moment, the church-bell calls him to the worship of God ; but he excuses himself saying : “ I have married a wife, and therefore I can not come.” (Luke 14:20.) Again he is urged by the voice of conscience to approach the holy Sacraments, to assist at Missions, Jubilees, the Forty Hours’ Adoration,

and other like opportunities of grace, but he replies : " I have bought a farm " (verse 18), I must examine my accounts, I must take care of my children, I must endeavor to leave them a respectable fortune—"therefore, I cannot come ! " "

2. Do not misunderstand me, dear Christians. I do not blame your thrift and industry. A prudent care is praiseworthy ; but your solicitude for worldly goods must not exceed that for heavenly treasures. All such inordinate care is *useless*. " Be not solicitous," says our Lord Jesus Christ. (Matt. 6:25, 31, 34.) " Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his justice : and all these things shall be added unto you." (Luke 12 : 31.) " Casting all your solicitude upon him ; for he hath care of you ; " (1 Pet. 5 : 7.) " Who giveth to beasts their food ; and to the young ravens that call upon him." (Ps. 146 ; 9.) All the inordinate care and labor of men, apart from God, can not advance their interests or increase their store one single iota.

II. When we are enamored of earthly goods, we are either

1. *Devoid of all love of God* ; or else,
2. *Our love of him is very imperfect.*

1. A true love of God cannot possibly exist with an inordinate love of temporal things. " If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him." (John 2: 15.) " Know you not that the friendship of this world, is the enemy of God ? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of this world, becometh an enemy of God " (James 4: 4.) He that fixes his heart too much on earthly goods, will, at last, go so far as to prefer the temporal to the eternal ; and, in his heart, will place everything in creation before God. There are people " whose God is their belly," (Phil. 3: 19,) that is, who serve their appetites as zealously as they should serve their God.

2. There are others, who still pay some attention to the voice of conscience, who wish to unite the love of God with the love of the world. This is impossible. " No man can serve two masters," neither can he love them equally. God requires not a part, but the whole of our hearts. He has even commanded that we love him with our whole heart and with our whole soul and with all our strength.

III. Lastly, *the loss of temporal goods can cause us nothing but trouble*, whether we lose them :

1. *By misfortune* ; or

2. *By death*.

1. Temporal possessions are not solid goods ; he who possesses them is in constant dread of losing them. How often do we read in history of a rich man becoming a beggar ? Whole kingdoms are not safe from destruction, how much less then, individual possessions ? When a sad accident or some sudden disaster happens, then a man realizes that all his toil and sweat have been in vain. This is truly a deplorable loss for the one who has been deprived of his temporal treasures, having, alas ! made no provision for the eternal !

2. "If we might only be certain," you say, "of enjoying the fruits of our labor until the end of our lives !" Oh, the folly of such hopes ! To labor day and night for the acquisition of those miserable things, which we possess only for a short time, and in fear and trembling, and which we shall certainly lose at the hour of death ! "Is it not reasonable," says St. Bernard, "nobly to despise those things which thou shalt sorrowfully lose ? Dost thou not act wisely by giving them to Christ rather than to death ! But thou knowest this sad truth too well. We must pray God that thou puttest into action that which thy understanding acknowledges to be just."

"Therefore, it remaineth that we use this world as if we used it not, for the figure of this world passeth away. But I would have you to be without solicitude." (1 Cor. 7: 31.) "Be not solicitous, therefore, saying : What shall we eat, or what shall we drink ! For after all these things do the heathen seek. For your Father knoweth that you have need of all these things. Seek ye, therefore, first the kingdom of God." (Matth. 6: 31-33.) Our first care must be for everlasting goods. The eternal must ever take the precedence of the temporal ; the finite must always give way to the Infinite. "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you." (John 6: 27.) And this must be the first care of the head of a family. In this sense, he may say : "Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat ?" He is bound to procure first the spiritual, and afterward the corporal food, for all the members of his family. Amen.

B.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT.

ON THE FRUITS OF A WORTHY COMMUNION.

“This is the bread descending down from heaven ; that if any one eat of it he may not die.” (John 6: 50.)

The Gospel of to-day narrates to us a wonderful and highly suggestive miracle. St. John tells us that when Jesus, having crossed the Sea of Galilee on a certain occasion, “had lifted up his eyes and seen that a very great multitude cometh to him, he said to Philip : Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat ?” Philip looked helplessly at Andrew, and they both turned expectantly to their divine Master. The latter caused the multitude to be seated at his feet. Taking the five barley loaves which a certain boy had brought with him thither, he blessed them and made his disciples distribute them amongst the people. All ate and were filled with this miraculous bread, and there yet remained over twelve baskets full of fragments.

Who does not see in the description of the Evangelist’s a type of that which is graciously repeated every day amongst us ! In the desert of this life, Jesus feeds his faithful followers with a truly miraculous Bread that they may not faint. He nourishes them with his sacred Body and Blood, so that if any one eat of this bread he may not die. In his omnipotence and love of all mankind, he makes this Bread productive of eternal life ; and so rich are its blessings and abundance that through centuries to come, generations yet unborn shall be filled with its sweetness and nourishment.

According to the desire and command of our Church, we also, at this season approach our Saviour, in order to receive this miraculous Bread, and through it endeavor to quiet the pangs of our spiritual hunger. And as I desire to increase your zeal and love for this divine banquet, I will now endeavor to describe to you the graces and rich blessings which flow from a worthy Communion.

- I. *Holy Communion unites us most intimately with Jesus Christ.*
- II. *It sanctifies our souls ;*
- III. *It strengthens our souls ; and*
- IV. *It leads us to everlasting life.*

I. The first and most precious grace which holy Communion effects in us, is *to unite us most intimately with Jesus Christ our Lord.* To this

end, our Saviour has concealed his divinity, and has hidden himself under the humble forms of bread and wine. He wishes (O marvelous condescension !) to become our very nourishment ! He has not chosen the gold of the mine, nor gleaming pearls, nor costly jewels, under which to hide the mystery of his gracious presence ; but he has selected the commonest elements of our daily food and drink. As every sort of food of which we partake is changed into our being, our flesh and blood : and as our nourishment and food become a part of ourselves, so, also, he who receives Jesus Christ in the holy Sacrament, is most intimately fused into him and united with him. "Thou shalt eat me," St. Augustine once heard a mysterious voice saying to him (as he tells us in his confessions), "and thou shalt not change me into thyself, but thou shalt be changed into me." (Con. L. 7, C. 10.)

1. What a wonderful union is effected when we receive and eat Jesus Christ as our food ! When one soul binds itself to another in the bonds of love, we say they are espoused to each other, wedded to each other. How strong, and intimate, and indissoluble, does this earthly union often become ! But what are all these nuptials compared to the sacred union of Jesus Christ with our souls ! He does not dwell in us by an external union and proximity as he does in the tabernacle ; he is not united with us merely spiritually, as two friends are united, as one soul lives in another—our Saviour abides in us as our food and nourishment, and is united with us in the most real and intimate manner. "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, abideth in me and I in him." (John 6: 57.) "He that eateth me, the same also shall live by me." (John 6: 58.) Thus speaks our Lord Jesus Christ of this mysterious union. St. Paul, filled with the grace of this holy union, cries out: "And I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me." (Gal. 2: 20.)

2. *Union and communion with God* are the highest and ultimate end of the whole universe. Union with God, and re-union with him is the destiny of man, and the greatest grace of redemption in Jesus our Saviour. Union with the Lord, and re-union with him after the fall into sin, is the ardent desire of all immortal creatures, the end of all the blessings which the Redeemer purchased for us upon the cross. But, as Jesus descended from heaven, and took upon himself our human nature, and as he by this assumption of human flesh united heaven with the earth, divinity with humanity, the temporal with the eternal; as his human body has been once the bond of union for the whole world, so Holy Communion is the gracious bond which intimately unites every Christian soul with its God and Lord. "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me."

3. Who can comprehend, who can express the grace and blessing which lie in this single effect of the Holy Communion for us! What is the desire of every one here upon earth? What is the end and aim of all our actions and sacrifices during our mortal life? You all answer: We are striving after eternal bliss. We are journeying towards heaven, we wish to gain everlasting happiness. But what is meant by the word heaven? In what does everlasting happiness consist? In nothing else than in union, in eternal and indissoluble union and communion with God. But how could we effect all this without the Holy Communion? The beatitude of heaven is an eternal communion, an unceasing enjoyment of the Lord: and according to the words of Jesus Christ, it is impossible to participate in this eternal communion, unless one has commenced it already here upon earth, through the reception of this most Holy Sacrament of the altar. "This is the bread descending down from heaven; that if any one eat of it, he may not die." (John 6: 50.)

II. If, contemplating with the eyes of faith the eternal beatitude of heaven and our future union with God, we descend into the depths of our own sin-stained hearts, have we not cause to fear and tremble? Who could hope of his own strength to be able to enter after death into the most intimate intercourse with God? Here, again, the Holy Communion comes to our aid. *It sanctifies our souls*, and makes them worthy, in the highest degree, of union with God.

1. *The Sacramental Guest* who descends into our hearts in holy Communion, is a living and holy God, the source and fountain of a new and better life in us, consuming all sin and iniquity in our souls, and making us purer and holier, and more worthy of an eternal union with himself. Holy Communion destroys all those sins of daily occurrence which we call venial sins, because they are caused, not by the malignity of our will, but by the frailty of our heart. The Council of Trent says that the Holy Communion is an antidote whereby we are cleansed from venial sins, and preserved from mortal sins.

2. Holy Communion cannot blot out mortal sin in our souls. He who, stained with such guilt, would dare approach to receive the God of all sanctity, receives him to his own greater ruin. This life-giving Food would become to such a man a deadly poison. The adorable Sacrament of the Altar does not effect the sanctification of our souls by delivering us from mortal sin (as the Sacrament of Penance does); but it increases sanctifying grace in souls where it already exists. It elevates the power of our supernatural love and contrition, and not only strengthens us in our life of grace and in our good resolutions

and intentions, but also destroys in us all those lesser sins, which originate rather in want of understanding and weakness of heart than in perverseness of the will. It is thus, in short, the source of true sanctity. He who frequently nourishes himself with this holy banquet, and co-operates with the grace he there receives, will not only be strengthened in his good resolutions and animated and inflamed with a higher devotion, but the Holy Communion will make him purer, more beautiful and glorious in the sight of God. In a pious soul, the divine Host will act like a glowing fire. As the fire seizes with irresistible force upon every object which comes in its way, at first warming, and then penetrating it until it becomes, with what it feeds upon, one fiery glowing mass, so, also, holy Communion seizes the devout soul, warming and penetrating it with the love of God, until, purified and sanctified by divine grace, it becomes with him one glowing fire and flame of holy love.

3. Jesus Christ, when worthily received in the holy Communion, strengthens us against very grievous sin, and protects us from relapsing into mortal sin. He extinguishes in us the fire of concupiscence, and weakens and diminishes the power and the snares of Satan. What temptation can be strong and vehement, that Jesus Christ dwelling in our hearts, cannot conquer it? "If God be for us, who is against us?" (Rom. 8: 31.) Must not the divine nature and perfections which the holy Communion imparts to us, become for us the strongest and mightiest incentive to good? When the King of heaven and earth enters a heart in most profound humility, the spirit of haughtiness and pride of life cannot fail to abandon their stronghold therein. If Purity, if Chastity itself, has sanctified our souls and bodies, will not the unclean spirit flee far from us? If he who is meek and humble of heart dwells in us, must not our thoughts, words and actions reflect the image of his meekness and patience? The fire of divine charity burning in our hearts must needs ignite them as well, and enkindle in them a higher degree of divine love.

III. Consider further, (in order to understand the wonderful graces contained in the holy Communion) *the strength imparted by this divine food of the soul.* Man's earthly career is a chain of cares, woes, and miseries. These sufferings and struggles are oftentimes so numerous and oppressive, that weighed down by their burden, one is apt to forget his eternal destiny. In short, we need all the strength and power which confidence in God can give us, in order to, peacefully and trustingly, pursue our path to eternity. And this strength is contained in the holy Communion.

Elias fleeing from his enemies, fatigued well-nigh unto death, slept

in the shadow of a juniper-tree in the desert, when lo ! " An Angel of the Lord touched him, and said to him : Arise, and eat. He looked, and behold, there was at his head a hearth-cake, and a vessel of water ; and he ate and drank : and he fell asleep again. And the angel of the Lord came again the second time, and touched him, and said to him : Arise, and eat ; for thou hast yet a great way to go. And he arose and ate, and drank ; and walked in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights, unto the mount of God, Horeb." (3 Kings 19 : 5-8.) We are all pilgrims through the desert of this earthly life, unto the mount of God, unto the city of the Lord. Our Church, therefore, regards the mysterious and strengthening food of the prophet Elias, as a figure of holy Communion, of which we must eat, and eat again, if we would not faint on the way, to our true home in heaven.

1. Who shall describe the wonderful strength imparted to our souls by holy Communion ! The woman of the Gospel touched only the hem of our Saviour's garment, and was healed. With what strength, then, will not our souls be animated in the holy Communion, since, in that adorable Sacrament, we do not merely touch the hem of our blessed Lord's garment, but receive into our hearts his whole heavenly essence, and the fulness of the God-head ? When Jesus walked the earth, there flowed forth from his sacred Humanity upon mankind, abundant streams of grace and benediction. All that ocean of blessings inundates our souls in holy Communion. Who ever drew near to Jesus during his mortal life, without experiencing his mercy ? St. John the Baptist received the wonderful grace of sanctification when both he and the Lamb of God were yet in their mothers' wombs. The holy Apostles, the Jews, and the Pagans basked in the beneficent beams that shone forth from the Incarnate Word. Wherever the Lord went through Judea, vestiges of grace marked his footprints. He still leaves the same gracious legacy of love in all souls who worthily receive him in the holy Communion.

2. Tell me, my brethren, have you not often experienced the strength and grace contained in this heavenly Sacrament ? Heaven itself enters with the holy Communion into the soul of the good Christian. In those moments wherein like St. John, we repose upon the bosom of our Lord, all storms are past ; all wants satisfied. Even the greatest sufferings, at that hour, seem light and sweet. The heavy clouds of sorrow and care are dispersed like a summer shower. In the far distance, the soul stills hears the rolling of the thunder ; she, herself, however, basks in the pure sunlight of that happiness, that felicity, which streams over her in close contact with her Lord and

God. If now, in advanced life, when your soul has grown hard through familiarity with the world and with sin, you no longer understand the language of heaven ; if now you no longer feel and appreciate the happiness of a worthy Communion, O then recall to mind the days of childhood and youth, when you received your Saviour into a pious, pure, and innocent heart. Tell me, is there a greater happiness than that of a holy Communion ! Paradise is then and there disclosed to us !

3. All pious souls have always sought and found strength and support in this unfailing source of grace. The Saints have drawn their sanctity, the oppressed have derived their heavenly joy and freedom from this divine fountain. Look back upon the first centuries of Christianity ! Look down into the dungeons in which the Christian martyrs pined to be led forth to a cruel death ! What gave helpless children, tender virgins and tottering men of old age, that super-human strength which enabled them to endure patiently the most exquisite torments and come forth victorious from the severest trials. The Eucharistic God, the divine Bread of Life ! If a priest or a deacon sent to them by the Church were so fortunate as to reach the threshold of their prison, and administer to them in that supreme hour the Bread of Angels, lo ! they united their voices in holy hymns of praise and thanksgiving, and hastened joyfully to meet their executioners. What enables those who devote their lives to the nursing of the sick and the instruction of the ignorant, or who consecrate themselves to the ministry of the altar, to persevere in their arduous calling ? It is Jesus in the holy Sacrament ; Jesus who calls out to them : "Have confidence ; I have overcome the world !" Look for a moment at the ordinary life of men, consider a Christian father or a mother in their many and pressing cares for their family ! When the cross which they carry becomes too heavy and insupportable, they hasten to the church and prostrate themselves before the tabernacle. They receive their Lord ; they hear his voice, which strengthens and comforts them, calling out to them : "Have confidence, I have overcome the world !" What will best fortify the Christian youth against the power and influence of bad example ? What will strengthen the Christian maiden in her conflict with the seducer, who seeks, by flattery and all the arts of the devil, to ensnare her heart, to destroy her virtue ? Nothing but the holy Communion is of any avail ! He who in the battle of life abstains from this celestial source of strength and courage, will be overcome, and perish.

IV. Let us briefly consider how *the holy Communion leads us to*

eternal life. It is, to us, a pledge of our eternal salvation, and of our future glorious resurrection.

1. When the dying Christian finds himself at the portal of eternity, his last, ardent desire is for the holy Viaticum, that his Saviour may accompany him on his long journey to eternity. After he has received his Lord and God, peace and glory shine forth from his eyes. Jesus is his strength in the death-agony. He no longer fears death; for he has within him the true Life.

2. Holy Communion is to the dying man also a pledge of his future resurrection, his heavenly glory and the transfiguration of his body. How should the body which has been nourished with the flesh and blood of the Redeemer, decay forever and be annihilated in foul corruption? The fruit of Eden's forbidden tree once caused death, but this fruit of the Tree of Life heals the wound of death, and is the powerful medicine of soul and body. Even when the body decays in death, the soul which has been nourished and strengthened by holy Communion, holds fast to the promise of Jesus Christ: "If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever!" (John 6:52.) "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." (Ibid. 55.) "This is the bread descending down from heaven; that if any one eat of it, he may not die." (Ibid. 50.)

After having explained to you the gracious effects of holy Communion, it seems to me, that I have said so little, that I might exclaim with the Wise Man: "Who is able to declare his works? For who shall search out his glorious acts? And who shall show forth the power of his majesty? or who shall be able to declare his mercy? Nothing may be taken away, nor added; neither is it possible to find out the glorious works of God: When a man hath done, then shall he begin; and when he leaveth off, he shall be at a loss." (Ecclus. 18:2-6.) Little as we can comprehend the infinite essence of God, his greatness and his love, his power and majesty; so little can we express what for us is contained in this divine Bread wherein we adore and praise our Lord and Saviour. But if you desire to experience all that the holy Communion contains for your soul, prepare yourselves after a contrite confession, to worthily receive this Bread of Angels; and then when our Saviour reposes in your heart, and your soul is inundated with the waves of never ending happiness, then, you will know by experience, more clearly than human tongue can express, how sweet and gracious is the Lord, and "How great is the multitude of thy sweetness, O Lord, which thou hast hidden for them that fear thee!" (Ps. 30:20.) Amen.

BISHOP EHRLER.

LECTURE FOR ST. PATRICK'S DAY.

March 17th.

THE DESTINY OF THE IRISH RACE.

That God knows and governs all things—that whatever happens, is either done or permitted by him, and that he proposes to himself wise and beneficent ends in all he does or permits—are truths which lie at the foundation of all religion. The wicked may contemn his commands, but they can not withdraw themselves from the reach of his power. While their wickedness is entirely their own, God makes them, however unwilling or unconscious, instruments to work out his ends.

It is thus that individuals, as well as nations, have each a peculiar destiny. Not that there is a blind fate, such as Pagans imagined ; but that an all-seeing, and all-governing God proposes to himself certain objects which he is determined to attain, despite the perversity of man.

Sometimes manifest, sometimes hidden, sometimes far-reaching, sometimes limited—the designs of God are always worthy of their Author, always conducive to his glory and the salvation of men.

It is in the light of these principles, that I undertake *an investigation of the Divine purposes regarding the Irish race*. These purposes seem to me no longer a matter of vague speculation ; they are written in unmistakable characters in the developments of events.

The history of the Irish race is in many respects peculiar. Few nations received the faith so readily, and no other preserved it amidst similar struggles. St. Patrick first announced the Gospel at Tara to the assembled princes of the realm. He received permission to preach it unmolested, throughout the length and breadth of the land. By his indomitable zeal and heroic virtue, he succeeded in so effectually winning the natives that at his death few pagans remained in Ireland. Not a drop of blood was shed among the primitive Irish apostles and their neophytes. Theirs was the martyrdom of exalted virtue and persevering self-sacrifice. Nowhere else did the Gospel take root so quickly and so firmly or produce fruit so immediate and abundant. Catholic Ireland soon became the home of the saints and sages of Christendom. To many of the nations of the continent her apostles went forth, charged with the embassy of eternal truth. In every realm of Europe, her children established sanctuaries of piety and learning ; and to her hospitable shores the natives of other lands flocked to receive educa-

tion, and even support from her gratuitous bounty. Abodes of sanctity dotted her hills and valleys ; and thus were laid deep the foundations of that strong attachment to the faith, which, later, was to be exposed to the most severe assaults.

For the day of trial came at last. Reposing in peace under the shadow of the Gospel, the barbaric invasion, that swept before it every vestige of learning and religion in many parts of Europe, finally reached the shores of Erin. She was the only country that repelled the proud invader. But she did this at the cost of her life's blood. For two centuries the Dane trampled her sons under foot. The legends of his cruelties yet re-echo in the national traditions. But the Irish race at last arose in its might, and drove the barbarian from its shores. The churches of the country had been pillaged, its monasteries plundered, its institutions of learning destroyed, everything that the sword could smite, or fire consume, had perished ; but Erin came out of the ordeal preserving her own virginal integrity, and displaying on her bosom the jewel prized above all else—her glorious Faith.

Not long was she to enjoy her dearly-bought peace. Availing himself of the discords naturally arising from the disorganized state of society, the Saxon succeeded in gaining a foothold on her soil. Craftily fanning the national feuds, the new invader kept possession and gained strength until his rule became at last almost as severe a calamity as had been the oppressions of the Dane. To hatred, which is generally greater in the oppressor than in the oppressed, were added, in time, religious fanaticism, and its greedy associate, the desire of plunder. The Irishman was hunted in his own country, as if he were a wild beast. The property of Catholics was confiscated ; and most stringent laws were enacted to prevent its renewed acquisition. Priests, wherever found, were put to death, and the severest penalties were inflicted on those who harbored the anointed ministers of Christ. Extermination by fire and sword was ordered, in so many words, and was attempted. When this failed, a system of penal laws was established, which later were only partially abandoned in order to give place to a system of proselytism, which appealed by bribes to the basest instincts of oppressed and downtrodden men.

Yet neither confiscation of property, nor famine, nor disgrace, nor death in its most hideous forms, could make the Irish people waver in that faith which their forefathers received from St. Patrick. There were, of course, from time to time, and there are still, a few exceptions. But as a general rule the places that could not be procured or retained, except by apostasy from the faith, were heroically resigned. The rich allowed their property to be torn from them, and willingly became poor for Christ ; the poor bore hunger and nakedness, want and cold, and though every earthly good was arrayed temptingly before them

they scorned to purchase comfort at the price of apostasy. During the four years from 1846 to 1850, nearly two millions either perished from hunger or its attendant pestilence, or were forced to leave their native land to escape both. In the midst of the dead and dying, proselytizers showed themselves everywhere well provided with food and money, and *Bibles*, and every one of the sufferers felt and was made to feel that hunger and sickness would come to an end as soon as he was willing to barter his faith for bread. Yet the heroic people stood fast under the dreadful temptation. *They died by the roadsides, or they fled to foreign shores, but they clung to their faith, and unwaveringly refused to eat the bread of apostasy.*

It would, however, be not only unfounded to flatter ourselves that this stability in the faith is the result of any thing peculiar in the Irish nature, but it would be, I may say, a blasphemy to assert it. God alone can preserve any one in the paths of truth and virtue ; how much more must we attribute to him the fidelity of a whole race, under the trying circumstances here enumerated.

Such grace may have been given, as many believe, in reward of the readiness and the fulness with which your ancestors first received the faith of the Gospel, and it is hoped that God will to the end grant the same grace of fidelity to their descendants. St. Patrick is said to have asked this favor from God for the nation which so readily corresponded to his call. This prayer has been heard, or at least this grace has been granted, up to the present. When the sons of Ireland on this day return in thought to the homes of their fathers, they may indeed look back upon a land inferior to many, in the elements of material greatness. They may behold her castles and rich domains in the possession of the stranger. They may view the masses of their race with scarcely a foothold in the land of their fathers, liable to be ejected from the farm, and driven out on the public highways, and from the highways into the crowded town, and from the hovels of the crowded town into the poorhouse, and even at the poorhouse denied the right of admission. But amidst all the miseries of those who yet dwell in the old land, in spite of the wiles of unscrupulous governments, and heartless and tyrannical landlords, and hypocritical proselytisers, in spite of open violence and covert bribes, their undying attachment to the faith remains unaltered, unshaken, a monument of national virtue more honorable than any which wealth or power could erect, or flattery devise.

But all this is a grace, a great grace of God. It reveals a purpose of heaven more bountiful in regard to this people, than if he had raised them to the highest place in material power amongst the nations of the earth.

Temporal prosperity, in its various forms, though a favor from God,

is not his most precious blessing. He himself selected the way of the Cross. In abjection and suffering he came into the world, he lived in it despised and persecuted, he died amidst excruciating torments. To those whom he loved in a special manner, he says : " Can you drink the chalice which I am to drink, and be baptized with the baptism with which I shall be baptized," and when they reply : " they can," the promise that this shall be fulfilled, his leading them to follow him in the way of the Cross, his calling them to suffer for righteousness is the best pledge of his greatest love.

This grace he has given to Ireland. Her children have received and accepted the call ; they have reaped the reward. Indeed, I have found the opinion entertained by many clergymen of extensive experience, that there is not probably another people on this earth of whom more in proportion to their number leave this world with well grounded hopes of a happy eternity. They do not, it is true, display a boastful assurance, that they are about to ascend at once into heaven. But vast masses serve God with humble fidelity in life, and, at death, acknowledging and sorry for their sins, doing all they can to comply with his requirements, they throw themselves, with resignation to his will, into the arms of his Mercy.

Were nothing else apparent in the purposes of God, we might stop here. We would find a great and worthy object for all that Ireland has suffered, and cause to thank the Almighty Ruler for having given her the grace to suffer in union with and for the sake of his Son. But God's graces are often given for ulterior purposes, and it may be asked whether the extraordinary preservation of this nation's faith has not another object in his wise and merciful counsels. It appears to me that this is now clear in the case of Ireland. But to understand it properly, we must reflect more closely on her connection with England, and on the condition of this latter country.

In the sixteenth century England abandoned the faith to which she had adhered for a thousand years. Her apostasy, though consummated by degrees, may be said to have become at last complete. The blood of her best sons flowed at Tyburn. The priests that were not of the number were banished, or forced to seek safety in hiding places. The same price was put on the head of a priest as on that of a wolf. The property of Catholics was confiscated, their children were taken from them, and educated in the religion of the establishment. These and analogous measures produced their effect at last. Were it not for these things, a great part of the nation, if not a majority, would be Catholic to-day. Though they desired no share in the plunder of the Church, and had no fancy for the new theories of the Reformers, they were weak enough to yield to a pressure, under which compromise first and then apostasy afforded the only means of escaping confiscation and

the loss of every social advantage, frequently the only means of escaping death. The old faith stamped, indeed, its mark on the institutions of the kingdom in a manner that could not be blotted out. It left its memorials everywhere throughout the land. The noble universities, the gorgeous cathedrals, and the splendid ruins scattered over the surface of the country are witnesses of its departed power, but, it is itself effectually blotted out from the hearts of the people. Though the most noble kings and princes of the land had delighted in honoring Catholicity, though England had sent her Apostles and her Saints into many a clime, though her hills and valleys had re-echoed for centuries with the sweet song of Catholic devotion, her people now know nothing more hateful than the faith, under the auspices of which their fathers were civilized. They nickname it "Popery" and the name expresses that which is to them most hateful.

Yet this England, this Catholic-hating England, has become one of the greatest nations of the earth in the material order. Her fleets are mirrored in every sea, her banner floats on every continent. It has been truly said that the sound of her drums, calling her soldiers from slumber, goes before and greets the rising sun in its circuit around the globe. But what is most remarkable, and certainly not without some great purpose in the order of divine Providence, England has become in our day the great hive from which colonies go out to people islands and continents in distant parts of the world, lands which were before vast wastes, tenanted only by the wild beast, or by the savage scarcely less ferocious. Indeed, she is the only nation in our day that seems to have received such a mission.

And is it then to an apostate nation exclusively that God has given the mission to fill up this waste? Is it a corrupted faith only which is to be borne to these savage nations, and to be planted in those vast regions which God has made known to civilized man in these latter days? Were this the case, we might tremble, though we should adore it as one of the inscrutable judgments of God, dealing with nations in his great wrath. But is such the fact! *It would indeed be the fact were it not for faithful Ireland.* But united as England is with Ireland, the result is quite otherwise. The very ambition and desire of gain which impel England to extend her power and plant her colonies in the most distant countries of the globe, become the instruments for carrying also the undying faith of Ireland to the regions which England has conquered.

Saul went to seek Samuel, thinking only of finding his father's asses. God was sending him to be anointed king over his people. England sends her ships all over the world, thinking only of markets for the produce of her forges and her looms. God is sending her that she may spread everywhere the faith of the Irish people.

Under the “Union Jack,” on which the crosses of St. George and St. Andrew are blended together—but so blended as to prevent any Christian symbol being recognized—a fit emblem of the effect of the union of jarring sects, each professing to proclaim Christianity, but between them, only obscuring and obstructing it, the Irishman too is borne to the distant colony. He goes probably before the mast, or in the forecastle, but he bears with him the true faith, and when he lands he hastens to raise its symbol. This may be first over a rude chapel. But it is a signal to other way-farers, and they gather under its shade to offer up the sacred mysteries. As soon as his means permit, even before he can build a good dwelling for himself, he takes care that the house of God be, in every possible degree, worthy of its sacred character. And so the Church creeps on and grows, and the regions that sat in darkness are now blessed by the offering of the adorable sacrifice and the announcement of the true faith.

The Irishman, generally speaking, did not leave home through ambition, or for conquest. He departed with sorrow from the shade of that hawthorn around which the dearest memories of childhood clustered. He would have remained contented with the humble lot of his father, had he been allowed to dwell there in peace. But the bailiff came and, to make wider pastures for sheep and bullocks, his humble cottage was levelled, and he himself sent to wander through the world in search of a home. But in his wanderings he carries his faith with him, and he becomes the means of spreading everywhere the Church of God.

It is thus that the tempest which seems but to destroy the flower, catches up its seeds and scatters them far and near, and these seeds produce other flowers as beautiful as that from which they were torn, so that some fair spot of the prairie, when despoiled of its loveliness, but affords the means of covering the vast expanse with new and variegated beauties. It is thus that famine, and the pestilence, and the inhuman eviction of Irish landlords have spread the faith of Christ far and near, and planted it in new colonies, which when they shall have grown out of their tutelage, will look back to the departed power of England and the undying faith of Ireland as, in the hands of Providence, the combined causes of their greatness and their orthodoxy. Macaulay's traveler from New Zealand, who will, on some future day, from a broken arch of London Bridge, take a sketch of the ruins of St. Paul's, may be some Irish O' or Mac on a pilgrimage to the Eternal City, who passes that way—having first landed on the shores from which his ancestors were driven by the crowbar-brigade, and visited with reverence the hallowed graves, under whose humble sod lie the bones of his martyred forefathers.

It is thus that the Catholic faith is being planted in the British

colonies of North America ; it is thus it is carried to India, and to Australia and to the Islands of the South Sea. There are laid the foundations of flourishing churches, which promise at no distant day to renew, and even to surpass the work done by Ireland in the palmiest days of faith, when her sons planted the cross, and caused Christ to be adored, as he wished to be adored, in the most distant regions of the earth.

The magnitude of this work is not to be measured even by the importance of these transplanted churches at the present moment. The countries to which I have alluded are but in their infancy. We can see on this continent the rapid strides of such infant colonies. Within three-quarters of a century this country has advanced in population from three to over fifty millions, and, in most other elements of greatness, in still greater proportion. If it continue to increase, as it has done regularly from the beginning, at the end of this century, or soon after, it will have a population of over one hundred millions, that is, as great as is now the population of France and Spain, and Italy, and Great Britain combined. If this is expected in this country in twenty years, what will the case be in one or two hundred, in this and so many others similarly situated ?

Australia starts with all the advantages of this country, and some peculiar to itself, and is following it with giant strides. It may overtake it before long, if not outstrip it. But the position of Catholicity there is very different from what it was at the commencement, or even at an advanced period in the United States. The Catholics in Australia occupy a position of practical social equality with others. They will grow with the growth and strengthen with the strength of their adopted country, and have their fair share in its importance.

England herself, from which the Catholic name was thought to have been almost blotted out, has been deeply affected by this exodus of Irish Catholics. In her cities and towns, and hamlets, the cross has been raised from the dust. At the side of the ancient monuments, which remind England of her apostasy, humble spires rise in every part of the land, and tell that nation, that the Faith which they thought destroyed, still lives, and is ready to admit them again to its wonted blessings. They stand there, and betoken the unity and stability of that faith of which they are the symbols—of that faith which reclaimed the fathers of that people from barbarism, and continued to be the faith of the land for a thousand years, and is yet a faith, and the only faith, in which men of every tongue and every clime are united. The English people see its unity and stability, while they are forced to witness the ever shifting and clashing forms of the religion that was substituted for it. For in the name of the one Christ, and the one Bible, altar is everywhere erected against altar, pulpit thunders against

pulpit, the teaching of to-day is contradicted in the same pulpit on the morrow, yet each one proclaims his own device as the plain teaching of Scripture.

This confronting of unity with confusion, of steady adherence to truth with the ever-varying shifts of error, of the mild but bright glory of an everlasting Church with the frivolities of the proudest inventions of men, is a grace, and a great grace which God grants. It is a grace for the use of which that people will give a strict account. And, oh, may that use be, that they will make it fructify to their salvation. For while we appreciate the blessings granted to ourselves, we have no other feeling in their regard than a wish that *they too* may share in these blessings, and be like unto us in everything.

But whether well used or abused, whether unto the ruin or salvation of many in that country, this grace is given chiefly through the Irish emigration. I am not unaware of, nor do I undervalue the importance of the faithful remnant that has in England steadfastly continued in the faith once delivered to the Saints, nor of the accessions made to their number by the conversion of so many noble souls, to whom God gave light and strength to overcome.

It is the Irish emigration that has chiefly supplied the vast throng of worshipers at English altars, that has made churches and schools spring up, and that has finally called for the restoration of a numerous hierarchy. As if to mark this fact and point out the great part that Ireland had in restoring Catholic life to England, God has so arranged it that the first head and brightest ornament of that new hierarchy should be the son of Irish emigrants—his Eminence, the late gifted and illustrious CARDINAL WISEMAN.

And even in these United States, let people say what they please, has not the Irish race held the first place in planting the cross throughout the length and breadth of the land? I know and acknowledge the important services rendered to Catholicity in the United States by the sons of other foreign races. God has sent us many illustrious men from France, Belgium, and Italy, who have occupied the foremost ranks in the ministry, whose heroic virtues and zealous works are even now as beacon-lights to all who labor for God's glory. Germany has given us many of her hardy sons to labor with the steadfastness of their countrymen in building up the walls of the Sanctuary. These are, indeed, a most important element, and are destined to become more important every day. They may yet exercise a greater influence on the destiny of the Church in this country than the Irish race. But so far, I think no one will claim that they can be compared in numbers with the sons of Erin; or that they equal, in their labors, the results the latter have attained. Of the converts in this country, we may say the same thing as of those in England.

Giving every man his due—for there is not, (and should not be,) any room here for jealousy—I think it will be admitted that it is above all others to Irishmen and to their children that the spread of Catholicity is due in this land. Far and near, no matter who ministers at the Catholic altar, (though there, too, the sons of Ireland have done their share), in the body of the church you will find that Erin's children constitute the bulk, and, in many cases the whole of the congregation. Their hard-earned dollars were foremost in supplying means to buy the lot and erect the Catholic churches in city or country-side. The priest or missionary, no matter what his own nationality, was nowhere more confident of finding help and support than among the Irish emigrants or their children. Wherever a railway or a canal, or any other hive of industry invited their sturdy labor, the cross soon sprung up to bear witness to their generosity and their faith.

Even the old Maryland colony, though consisting chiefly of English Catholics, seeking here a freedom of conscience denied them at home, had its Irish elements, and that not the least noble in deeds, nor the least conspicuous in virtue.

When, at the period of the revolution, the noblest men of this land stood together, shoulder to shoulder, and issued that Declaration of Independence, to which they pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honors, it was a Catholic of the Irish race who affixed his signature for Maryland. In doing this, he pledged an honor as pure, and a life as precious as any of the rest, but he staked a fortune equal to, if not greater, than that of all the others put together. When he signed his name, some one standing by, said: "There go some millions!" Another remarked: "There are many Carrolls; he will not be known;" he overheard the remark, and to avoid all misconception, boldly wrote down in full: "CHARLES CARROLL OF CARROLLTON."

Yet, this noble scion of the Irish race, for so many years the pride and ornament of his native state, while fulfilling all the duties of an illustrious citizen, was not ashamed of the race from which he sprung. Instead of selecting amongst French *villes* or English parks or towns a name for his princely estate, he stamped on it a title with the good old Celtic ring. He called it after a property of one of his Irish ancestors, *Doughragan Manor*, thereby instructing his posterity and his countrymen that if they felt any pride in his name they must associate Charles Carroll of Carrollton with a race which so many affect to despise.

Let all the sons, yea, the sons of the sons of Ireland, be like to him, —faithful to their duties as citizens, ready to sacrifice their all for their country, whether that all be little, or as great as was his vast wealth; just, and respectful, and charitable to men of all races and creeds, not

anxious either to conceal or obtrude their own, but determined, in a word, faithfully to discharge all their civil and Christian duties. Let them be earnest in elevating the one by greater fidelity to the other.

It was also one of the Maryland stock—but of this same Irish race—another Carroll—who was chosen the first bishop and founder of the hierarchy of the young American Church; as if Providence here, too, wished to indicate from which race the chief strength of Catholicity was to be derived in this land.

Would it be overstraining matters to say that a hint of this was also given by Providence in the Irish name of the future Metropolitan See of the United States—the first in time, and always to be the first in dignity. The word "*Baltimore*" is an Irish word, and, through the founder of the colony, was derived from an Irish hamlet, looking, as it were, from the extreme south-west coast of Ireland, over the waters of the Atlantic, to this continent for the full realization of its name. The word in the Irish language means "*the town of the great house*," and it was beyond the Atlantic that Baltimore, in becoming the chief see of a great church, has truly become "*the town of the great house*;" for the church or house at the head of which it stands, doubtless extends over a wider surface than any other church or churches amongst which any one bishop holds pre-eminence, excepting only the Church governed by the Vicar of Jesus Christ, to whom is committed the care of *all* the sheep and lambs of God's fold, that is, the whole of Christ's Church. In names which God has given, or permitted to be given, he has frequently foreshadowed the destinies of individuals and races. Would it be superstitious to suppose that in the Irish name of this American ecclesiastical metropolis—the only important city in this country that has an Irish name—Providence pointed, on the one hand, to its future position in the Christian hierarchy, and on the other to the character of the chief portion of the family of that house or church?

But, be that as it may, it was a scion of the Irish race who was the founder of the new American hierarchy. For some time he held the crozier alone. The whole country was his diocese. But he did not depart until he saw suffragans around him forming a regular hierarchy, that was destined to multiply and carry everywhere, mainly on Irish shoulders, the ark that would spread blessings throughout the land.

The work that has been thus commenced is no doubt destined to prosper. It is not without a motive that in this country the lines are drawn, and the foundations laid by Providence for a noble church. Its beginnings (for we may say it is yet in its infancy) bear many of the marks of the process by which the work was effected. It is destined to grow, and God grant it may grow, particularly in the mild beauty of Christian virtue, and win by love the homage of all the children of

the land, that all may receive through it the graces of heaven, and even their earthly prosperity be consolidated thereby, and become the means of acquiring still higher blessings.

But whatever be said of the United States, the Irish race is certainly almost alone in the work of diffusing Catholicity among the other English speaking nations of the globe.

The sufferings of Ireland were, therefore, the means, and evidently intended by God as such, to preserve her in the faith, to give her its rewards in a high degree ; and to make her and her sons instruments in spreading the winged seed of the faith throughout the entire world. This, therefore, is what I claim to be, in the counsels of God, *the destiny of the Irish race.*

In preserving the faith of the Irish race, God has provided a leaven of truth for the masses. By the side of systems of religion which men have devised, stands the everlasting Church, which, as Macaulay remarked, is the only connecting link between the civilization of the ancient and modern worlds,—the Church which taught the name of Christ to every nation that knows him, even to those who afterwards fell away from the fulness of truth—the Church which Augustine brought to England, and Patrick to Ireland—the Church that raised the dignity of the poor, and humbled the pride of the mighty, placing all on the level of the Gospel—the Church that claims no new inventions, but is itself an invention of God, infinitely surpassing all inventions of man, holding out nothing to the nineteenth, which it did not present to the first, to the tenth, and to every other century, but presenting to all the faith and institutions of God, able to save all, to elevate all, to bring all into one fold, that all may be united in one happiness in Heaven.

Is not this great result worth all the sufferings which Ireland has endured? The ways of God appear often circuitous. But in their circuitous course they are everywhere fraught with blessings. The children of Ireland suffered, yet, even in their sufferings, they were blessed—yea, blessed with the benediction which Christ himself pronounced upon those who suffer persecution for justice's sake ; for in their trials they have redeemed their own souls. Doubly blessed, because they preserved the ark of God, and carried it through the waters of tribulation to bless and enlighten more amply unborn and numerous generations.

What earthly mission, no matter how sublime, can be compared to this? What is even the spreading of civilization with its highest privileges, compared to the spreading of the saving institutions of the Gospel? Even in this world, virtue is esteemed as infinitely superior to mere physical forces. The humble peasant who does God's will, whose soul is adorned with his grace, is an object of complacency and

love to his Maker, whilst he turns in disgust and horror from the proud philosopher who can control the hidden powers of nature, and make them subservient to his will, but does not make his own will conform to the great law that should govern it—the sovereign will of God. When earth, and all that is earthly shall have passed away, the proudest human achievements will be seen to have been nothing, while all those who have caused God's name to be glorified, shall shine as bright stars through the endless ages of eternity !

O, my dearly beloved ! on this day, when the Church calls upon you to commemorate the heroic virtues and the glorious deeds of your great Apostle, St. Patrick, I would fain say to every son of Ireland—to every one in whose veins Irish blood flows—no matter where he himself may have been born, live worthy of your ancestry, an ancestry which is a noble one, noble in that which is the noblest thing man can rejoice in—*virtue and fidelity to God*. Yourselves are called in a special manner to do honor to your faith in spreading it among the greatest nations of the earth. Be faithful to your calling. Show yourselves worthy sons of the martyred dead. Make sure, like them, whatever else you fail in, not to fail in transmitting the faith to those intrusted to your charge—never exposing it to danger, or sacrificing it for any base worldly or selfish gains. Guard well, if need be, with your very lives that precious pearl of the faith of Christ ; and furthermore, spare no effort that you and those committed to your care, grow also in every virtue. Nay, endeavor so to live, that all men may learn to love the faith which is the spring of your actions, and thus glorify and love that God, who is the “ Author and Finisher of our Faith.”

MICHAEL O'CONNOR, Bishop.

PASSION SUNDAY.

VAIN GLORY.

“I seek not my own glory.” (John 8: 50.)

A preacher must recommend himself to his hearers chiefly in two ways, viz: By the sanctity of his life, and by the truth of his doctrine. The Pharisees, who regarded our Saviour with jealous eyes, reproached him with these insulting words: “Do not we say well that thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil?” Consequently, thou art neither holy in thy life, nor true in thy doctrine. Our Lord answered this vile calumny very gently, saying: “Which of you shall convince me of sin? If I say the truth to you, why do you not believe me?” You can allege nothing either against my conduct or my doctrine. “But I seek not my own glory.” Dearly beloved, this reply of our Saviour, is entirely opposed to the maxims of proud worldlings who reckon ambition as one of the distinguishing traits of a noble mind. I shall to-day endeavor to show you that those who seek their own glory act neither

I. *Reasonably*, nor

II. *Justly*.

I. Those act contrary to reason who contradict

1. *The doctrine*, and

2. *The example of our Saviour*.

1. The Apostle of the Gentiles says: “He that glorieth, may glory in the Lord.” (1 Cor. 1: 31.) What is more reasonable than to glory in him, in whom no one can find a flaw? “If you glory in a man,” says St. Augustine, something may be discovered in him which may reflect dishonor on you who have gloried in him. Now consider that you also are a mere man, and that you are equally foolish when you glory in yourself. “Glory is not seemly for a fool.” (Prov. 26: 1); he that seeks his own glory, glories in a fool; and is therefore foolish because he glories himself.

The answer of our Saviour to the Pharisees is most worthy of attention: “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing.” Dear brethren, these wicked men reproached the Incarnate Holiness with the grossest crimes; they called him a drunkard, a blasphemer, a publican, a transgressor of the law. But, now, consider the meekness of our Redeemer! He came to atone for sin, and he said, “Which of you shall convince me of sin?” He showed them by a syllogism that he cannot be a sinner who is able through the power of his Godhead to atone for sin, and

to justify the sinner. How entirely different would have been the answer of an ambitious child of this world !

II. He acts *unjustly* who,

1. *Deprives God of the glory which belongs to him alone* ; and
2. *Who attributes to himself, (a miserable man,) the honor which does not belong to him.*

1. "He that glorieth, may glory in the Lord." The Apostle knew full well, that the glory of the Creator does not belong to the creature. "I, the Lord, this is my name : I will not give my glory to another." (Isai. 42 : 8.) He repeats these powerful words : "For my own sake, for my own sake, will I do it, that I may not be blasphemed : and I will not give my glory to another." (Isai. 48 : 11.) The Angels sang : "Glory to God in the highest," (Luke 2 : 14,) and the Psalmist prays : "Not to us, O Lord, not to us ; but to thy name give glory." (Ps. 113 : 9.) "Bring ye to the Lord, O ye kindreds of the gentiles, bring ye to the Lord, glory and honor : bring to the Lord, glory unto his name." (Ps. 95 : 78.) Such powerful expressions, such impressive repetitions of important words, are scarcely to be found anywhere else in the Bible, except when the honor of God is concerned.

2. How unjust is that wicked man who would rob the great God of his honor by attributing it to himself ! To God, alone, belongs honor and glory. "But as for the just, they shall give glory to thy name." (Ps. 139 : 14.) Who, then, is like to God ? It was our Saviour alone who "thought it no robbery himself to be equal to God." (Philip. 2 : 6.) All other men commit a robbery and the greatest injustice, when they would take to themselves what belongs to God alone. Let each man contemplate himself—his origin, his nothingness, his original and actual sins, and then, let him imagine, if he can, his daring injustice in attributing any glory to himself !

How can we reasonably look for glory when our Saviour says : "I seek not my own glory ?" "I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also." (John 13 : 15.) "Be holy, because I am holy." (Levit. 11 : 44.) But if we cannot persuade ourselves to renounce all glory, let him "glory in the Lord, who glorieth." St. Bernard says that there have been philosophers who were of the opinion that the greatest human happiness is found in fame and glory : as if the soul could have its happiness in itself, when it has not even its existence from itself. We, Christians, who are enlightened by the light of faith, are far from entertaining such foolish ideas. Dearly beloved, when you shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say : "We are unprofitable servants !" (Luke 17 : 10.) B.

PASSION SUNDAY.

THE OBDURATE SINNER.

“They took up stones, therefore, to cast at him. But Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple.” (John 8:59.)

God, in creating us to his own image and likeness, has given us an immeasurable, almost infinite, scope for the cultivation and development of our souls. Our will, especially, possesses capabilities that can elevate us to the highest degree of perfection, and debase us into the most profound abyss of vice. By the assistance of God's grace, it is ours to decide so firmly and unalterably on the side of virtue that we rarely falter in its practice ; but we may also wander so far away from God, and lose ourselves in sin, that we appear to be irredeemably lost to him and to his holy kingdom.

To-day's Gospel refers to this latter state—*obduracy in sin*. “Which of you shall convince me of sin ?” said our Lord Jesus to the Jews, a short time before his crucifixion : “I seek not my own glory, but, of my Father. It is my Father that glorifieth me, of whom you say that he is your God.” They could not answer him ; and again he said to them : “Abraham, your father, rejoiced that he might see my day ; he saw it and was glad. Amen, Amen, I say unto you, before Abraham was made, I am.” But the unbelieving descendants of Abraham took up stones to cast at him. And “Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple.” The downfall of the Jewish nation was sealed by their hardness of heart.

Of obdurate sinners, the Inspired Writer declares : “They leave the right way, and walk by dark ways : they are glad when they have done evil, and rejoice in most wicked things.” (Prov. 2:13, 14.) In all ages, there have been such men, who never arose after they once fell. All the admonitions and reproaches of their conscience, are in vain ; all the exhortations of the Church to penance, and amendment of life are fruitless ; all God's threats fall ineffectually upon hearts enclosed, as it were, in a coat of mail. The happiness the Lord sends them, in order to touch them by his benefits, makes them frivolous ; and misfortunes, instead of converting, embitter them. Without prayer, or contrition for their crimes, without the fear of God or the use of the holy Sacraments, they go through life like beasts, given up entirely to the lusts of the flesh.

That you may not be as these abandoned sinners, that you may not imitate the hard-hearted Jews, but listen with fruit to the admonitions

of holy Church calling you at this solemn time to fasting and repentance, I will explain to you to-day,

I. *The causes of obduracy in sin*; and

II. *The lessons we should draw from it for our own instruction.*

I. To sin is easy. Numberless are the dangers and attractions to evil, which surround us on all sides. We carry the inflammable material of the passions constantly within our bosoms, and it needs, at times, but a tiny spark of temptation, to cause them to blaze up into a raging and destructive fire. At first, however, sin, especially sensual sin, creates a loathing and abhorrence in a hitherto innocent soul. At the opening of a vicious life, there arises in the sinner a longing to be freed from the gross and leprous weight of increasing sin. He is ready to cry out with the royal penitent of old: "My iniquities are gone over my head: and as a heavy burden are become heavy upon me. I am become miserable, and am bowed down even to the end." (Ps. 37: 4, 6.) But if he goes on groveling in habitual sin, if he continues turning a deaf ear to the holy inspirations of divine grace, he grows accustomed, by degrees, to his terrible state; and, sinking lower and lower in crime, he ends by becoming utterly obdurate and callous in evil; insensible, deaf, and dead to the motions of the better part of his soul. That which one sin is unable to accomplish, is effected by a longer chain of evil, and a continued habit of wrong-doing.

I. Look into your own hearts, my brethren, and realize there the sad truth of my words! When we were little innocent children, how disturbed we were over the most trifling sin! A rash jest, an unbecoming word, the mere sight of evil terrified us *then*! Would, alas! that our delicacy of conscience, our prudent tenderness and anxiety of soul had increased with our years! Oft repeated sins have made us familiar with evil, and consequently indifferent to it! "The wicked man when he is come into the depths of sin, contemneth; but ignominy and reproach follow him." (Prov. 18: 3.) "Thy heart shall utter perverse things; and thou shalt be as one sleeping in the midst of the sea, and as a pilot fast asleep when the stern is lost." (Prov. 23: 34.) It is on this account that St. Chrysostom says: "The evil of sin is two-fold:—first, the injury it inflicts on the soul; and secondly, the tendency it engenders to always become worse." Habitual sin, like the octopus, grasps its victim firmly with its myriad arms, and rarely releases him until he has breathed his last.

Understand me, my dear Christians, God is not wanting to the sinner. Divine grace surrounds, and presses even the most hardened to repentance. At one time, it speaks to the unjust man in soft, mild

words ; again, it warns and threatens him by sufferings and severe afflictions.

2. But the struggle against evil demands labor and energy. Even the most faithful servants of God need to combat continually the insidious and powerful enemy of their souls. For the habitual sinner, therefore, the warfare is doubly desperate. Darling inclinations must be renounced ; evil habits stripped off, which cling as close as the fabled shirt of fire. That which has been passionately loved and desired, must be thoroughly detested and abandoned ; sinful companions must be given up, after the intimate intercourse of many years ; restitution must be made of ill-gotten goods ; lies and calumnies against one's neighbor must be contradicted ; and long-standing feuds and enmities brought to a happy end. All this involves self-sacrifice, self-denial, humiliation, and a thousand bitter battles with proud, corrupt nature. One's whole way of life must be completely changed. And this is why our Lord tells us that the Angels of heaven rejoice more over the conversion of one sinner than of ninety-nine just who need not penance. The struggle for conversion is such a long and tremendous one. The pleasures of sin are ever ready to allure the man whom divine grace moves to escape the toils. Satan whispers with pleading tenderness in his ear : " How can you ever renounce that charming companion ? How can you restore that money, those precious goods, that valuable property, to their rightful owner ? You will leave yourself and your family poor and dishonored. And as to reconciling yourself to that hateful enemy, or taking back the lies you have uttered against so-and-so,—such humiliations are not to be thought of !" If the sinner consent to these suggestions of the evil one, all hope of a change for the better usually dies out. He goes on heaping sin upon sin, scoffing at every admonition of God and of his grace. He sinks rapidly from one abyss of vice into another, until he falls at last into the bottomless pit of obduracy, impenitence, and eternal perdition. In vain, at the hour of death, the priest has been summoned—in vain, the consolations of our holy religion have been offered to the dying sinner. By stratagem or gentle force, the good friends and relatives have sought to secure the holy Sacraments for the departing soul—but, to the bitter end, the obdurate man rejects the grace of God. As Holy Writ declares : " The sinner hath been caught in the works of his own hands ; the wicked shall be turned into hell, all the nations that forget God." (Ps. 9: 18.) " The pride of them that hate thee ascends continually." (Ps. 73: 23.) " Thou hast bruised them, and they have refused to receive correction ; they have made their faces harder than a rock, and they have refused to return." (Jer. 5: 3.)

3. It is the doctrine of our holy Church that, without the grace of

God, we can do nothing good. "Not that we are sufficient to think any thing of ourselves, as of ourselves ; but our sufficiency is from God." (2 Cor. 3:5.) "God worketh in you both to will and to accomplish according to his good-will." (Phil. 2:13.) You know also that the ordinary grace of God, humanly speaking, does not suffice for the overcoming of very great temptations or powerful obstacles. At such moments, we need a stronger and more efficacious grace. What the sun is to the life of the earth, that the grace of God is to the soul. The blessed beams of heaven are the strength of our lives ; penetrating our hearts ; they rouse therein every good impulse, and nourish and ripen them to maturity. Grace is a free gift of God. It is given according to his good pleasure, as St. Paul says ; and that stronger and more powerful grace which God owes in no way to man, is simply the effect of his pre-eminent love and special predilection.

4. But will Almighty God continue to offer this extraordinary grace to the man who despises even ordinary inspirations ? No : he will either, as a punishment, withdraw his grace completely from him ; or give him merely that insufficient grace by which he can not overcome greater temptations and dangers. Finally, that condition of soul will set in, of which the holy Scripture says : "God himself will harden the heart of a man." He takes from his reason the light of knowledge, so that he can no longer see nor understand any thing conducive to salvation, and he deprives his will of the power of discerning correctly the good, and striving to do it. In his wrath, he tears asunder the bonds which unite him to that man, and lets him live on undisturbed in the depths of his sins. "They have mouths and speak not ; they have eyes and see not ; they have ears and hear not." (Ps. 113:5, 6.) "God," says St. Augustine, "does not harden the sinner as to malice, but he justly refuses to grant him mercy."

Look at *King Pharaoh*, in whom this unhappy condition was realized. In his pride, he opposed God's will and would not allow the people of Israel to go forth. Desiring to soften his hard heart, God permitted wonderful and hitherto unheard-of miracles to happen in his presence. But Pharaoh would not yield to grace. "Who is the Lord," he asked of Moses, "that I should hear his voice and let Israel go ? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." Thereupon, the Lord said to Moses, "I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servant." (10:1.) Pharaoh remained deaf to all the divine admonitions, and sank with his hosts into the Red sea. The magician *Elymas* withheld the grace of God which was offered him in the sermons and discourses of St. Paul, and he endeavored to hinder the governor of Paphos from believing. Then St. Paul said to him, "O, thou, full of all guile and of all deceit, son of the devil, enemy of all

justice, thou dost not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord. And now, behold the hand of the Lord upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a time. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness, and going about, he sought some one to lead him by the hand." (Acts 13:10, 11.) Corporeal blindness was the visible sign of that wretched man's interior or spiritual darkness. "He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts: that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted and I should heal them." (John 12:40.)

II. *What lessons should we draw from these considerations upon the obdurate sinner?* We shall find them fraught with certain holy admonitions for our own personal instruction.

1. The first is, to fly from the first approach of sin; and if you have already sinned, to hasten with all possible speed to reconcile yourself with the Lord your God, so that no sinful habit may take root within you!

Never dally with evil; it is dangerous sport to play with fire or with deadly weapons. You may be maimed or disfigured for life, even if you are not instantly killed. Would you make a pet of a rattlesnake, or carry a tarantula around in your bosom? Act toward the soul as you do toward the body. Do not wait until the fire has scorched you or the revolver has been discharged. Do not suffer the snake to crawl around your feet. "Flee from sin as from the face of a serpent." (Ecclus. 21:2.) Remedies taken in the beginning are always the best and most salutary. One sin begets another. The brood of Satan is a prolific one. As in a chain, link is joined to link, so the fetters of hell, sin by sin, bind the unhappy sinner a captive for all eternity! St. Augustine says: "As, when a stone is thrown upon the mirror-like surface of the sea, at first only one circle appears, then two; the second forms a third and so on, up to the very brim of the water, in like manner, will each sin become the occasion of a greater one to the hardened sinner; he falls from one sin into another, until, at length, it is almost impossible for him to cease sinning."

2. He who does not tremble at the first step on the road to vice, and does not at once make efforts to return to his outraged Lord and God, by means of the Sacrament of Penance, will soon sink more and more hopelessly into the abyss of vice and crime. Behold the avalanche of the Alps rolling menacingly and destructively down into the smiling valleys! The most trifling movement, the dropping of a little stone, yes, often merely the gentle flight of a bird are sufficient to cause the downfall of that massive weight of ice. In the beginning, it was only

a handful of snow ; but little by little, the ice and snow began to accumulate and grow in volume, until at last, the avalanche, rushing from its dizzy height, breaks down trees like straws, and sweeping along, like a torrent, overturns into the abyss houses and entire villages. A single flake of snow is the cause of all this ruin and widespread destruction ! In like manner a single wrong step often suffices to ruin the soul of a man eternally. The theft of a few pennies has aroused the cupidity of the highway robber. A thought of revenge not subdued and overcome in the outset, has produced murder. An impure desire not promptly banished has plunged its victim into the slough of licentiousness. Is not Judas, the traitor, a sorrowful example of this terrible truth ? "He loved money," says the Evangelist. From the love of money originated avarice and covetousness ; from these, robbery, then betrayal of his Lord and Master, which ended in suicide and his eternal reprobation !

Do we imagine it impossible for us to fall so low ? Do we think that we never could sink as others have done, into such an abyss of ruin ? Alas ! like our neighbors, whose fall we lament or censure, perhaps—we bear within us, weak, unsteady, and naturally corrupt hearts. The same dreadful abyss is at our feet, its gloomy depths only veiled from us by the screen of the divine permission. The same spiritual dangers beset us that have ship-wrecked others. The same fire of lust rages within our veins. We are not holier than King David, wiser than Solomon, nor stronger than St. Peter. We are not as fervent as thousands of uncanonized saints and servants of God who have fallen into sin and vice through their imprudence and self-confidence. Nothing but vigilance and flight, prompt conversion and amendment of life after the first fall, will save us and keep us from the abyss of ruin, as St. Paul says :—"Let him that thinketh himself to stand, take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10: 12.) "Watch ye and pray that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit, indeed, is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matt. 26: 41.)

3. It certainly requires a hard struggle for one who has been a slave to sin for a long time to free himself from the wicked bondage of bad habits, and become reconciled with his Lord and God. Great labor and much moral courage are demanded, after a long period of impenitence, to descend into the depths of one's conscience, and scrutinize and unravel the sins of years or of a life-time. It is a great tax on a proud man not only to confess his hidden secret sins and vices in the holy tribunal, but, furthermore, to extinguish by years of penance and satisfaction the evil consequences of those sins. It is a battle so difficult and fierce that none but a heroic soul, a heart filled with the love of God and supported by his grace, can come forth victorious

from the struggle. But the combat is necessary, nay, most indispensable. Does not every thing that is good in this life cost us labor and pain? Has not our Lord said: "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away?" (Matt. 11: 12.) And if the battle is fierce and long-continued, we have no one to blame for it but ourselves. Whoever has feasted upon the pleasures of sin, who has drunk in iniquity like water, must do penance for it, by the pains of the conflict, and he who has committed an injustice during his life must make good his error, with all his might; or he will never obtain pardon here, or eternal bliss hereafter. Even if the sinner continue in his evil courses, his sins will cause him woe and suffering to which the warfare in the cause of virtue can not be compared. The latter is child's play contrasted with that which vice necessarily begets in man's heart. Outwardly, the sinner may appear prosperous, happy, and peaceful; but if you could penetrate to the interior of that guilty soul, and there behold the stings of conscience which scourge it like cruel lashes;—if you could hear the interior groans of despair which issue therefrom in moments of peril or suffering, or in the quiet watches of a sleepless night, you could cheerfully embrace all the pains and labors of the penitential warfare, sooner than live in sin and endure the agonizing torments of Satan's bondage. Penance has its sweetness and its consolation, no matter how bitter the work of self-denial may appear at first to the newly-converted soul. The grace of God softens all austerities, and graciously conducts us to the grandest and most glorious victory. But the struggles of the vicious man will become hourly more horrible and will be but the commencement of eternal misery.

4. To these admonitions, I will add another; do not oppose a single inspiration of grace, for thereby you withstand your Lord and God, and incite him to pour forth upon you the vials of his wrath. Dallying with sin and evil is dangerous sport; but to trifle with God and his grace, his love, and his justice, would be a sacrilege, that must invariably end in ruin. Grace is offered to us according to a certain measure, and that measure none save our Lord himself can determine. "Lo! I stand at the door and knock," he says of himself; repulsed and despised, he repeats again and again his calls to salvation. He goes out like the householder of the Gospel, up to the eleventh hour, inviting laborers into his vineyard. But a day will come when he will cease to call, cease to knock at the door of our hearts. These words of mine, to-day, dear brethren, may be your last chance of grace. Will you thrust from you this golden opportunity of salvation? Shall we reply to him who calls us, perhaps, for the last time: "Come again, and then, possibly, I may listen to you?" God's love to us is great,

infinitely great, but his wrath is infinite as well, and he who despises and contemns his love, will certainly feel his anger !

Free-will may be to man either a wonderful blessing or a terrible curse. Bound by the fetters of an unchangeable and urgent necessity all lesser creatures obey the will of God ; man alone can say to this all-powerful Sovereign of heaven and earth : “ *Non serviam*—I will not serve thee ! ” He alone can oppose his commands. To him, it is given of his own free choice either, like a brilliant heavenly star to revolve forever around its true center, the eternal Sun of Justice, or to leave the appointed orbit, and like a fiery comet rush afar off from its Creator into eternal destruction. God has given us this capability of exercising free-will for his greater glory and our own great reward, making us thereby as kings resembling himself. And do we dare as his chosen children, as the sons of a heavenly Lord and Master, to do what the meanest slave in our household would not undertake to do ? The love of God, his gratuitous, undeserved love, would be, in that case, our utter reprobation and ruin, inevitably precipitating us a thousand fathoms deep into the abyss of hell ! But if we follow joyfully the calls of grace with our free-will, then we shall mount the celestial ladder to the infinite heights of eternal glory.

In these holy days, when in the world of nature, Spring struggles with winter ; and, in the world of grace, thousands of the faithful battle with the powers of sin and evil in their own hearts, let us, if we have hitherto been insensible and dead to God and his kingdom, begin this warfare for the salvation of our souls. Let us drive out all sin from our hearts by a worthy reception of the Sacrament of Penance, that Jesus may not hide himself or flee away from us. May the sunlight of his mercy shine forth warmly and benignly in the depths of our souls, and there awaken by true penance and amendment of life, the germs, blossoms, and fruits of all the Christian virtues ! Amen.

BISHOP EHRLER.

PALM SUNDAY.

CONFSSION.

“ Go ye into the village that is over against you: and immediately you shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them to me.” (Matth. 21: 2.)

Although man, through the gift of reason, is distinguished from the beasts, yet “ he is compared to senseless beasts, and is become like to them ” (Ps. 48: 13,) when refusing to listen to reason he commits sin. For, what can be more senseless than voluntarily to renounce that “ freedom wherewith Christ hath made us free,” (Gal. 4: 31,) and to enter the service of Satan ? The holy Fathers of the Church compare a man hardened with sin to the tethered ass mentioned in the present Gospel. But, for the consolation of the sinner, our Saviour says : “ Loose it, and bring it to me.” The bonds that bind a sinful soul can only be loosened by those to whom Christ said : “ Whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, it shall be loosed also in Heaven.” (Matth. 16: 19.) The priest will loose us from our sins ; but we must, beforehand, make him :

- I. *A true* ;
- II. *A sincere* ; and
- III. *An exact and particular Confession of our sins.*

This is what St. Bernard, in common with all the other Fathers of the Church, teaches us. We will take this opportunity of preparing you for your Easter Confession.

- I. The confession, must be *true* and not be made either
 1. *Through fear*, or
 2. *Through hypocrisy*.

1. Confession without true contrition is useless and profitless, and true compunction of heart can not exist without the love of God. Servile fear, alone, is not sufficient to re-unite us with God, from whom we have separated ourselves by sin. Many derive no benefit from confession, because they approach the holy tribunal without true contrition. “ They tell their sins to the priest, as if they were telling a story for amusement.” (St. Thos. of Villanova.) We should confess our sins with *a supernatural sorrow*, which causes us to love that which we have before hated, and to hate that which we have previously loved.

"I will speak in the bitterness of my soul," says Job, (Job 10:1); and thus should we speak in confession.

2. St. Bernard says that there are some who go to confession only to gain the good opinion of others. These know beforehand that their confessions are worthless and invalid. They should remember that, although they may deceive the priest, they can not deceive God: and that, when they deceive the priest, they are trying to deceive God, in whose name and authority he hears the confession. How often, alas! might it not be said to one who returns from the confessional under such circumstances: Unhappy man! "Thou hast not lied to men, but to God!" (Acts 5:4.)

II. The confession must be *sincere*, and we must not conceal either

1. *A sin*; or
2. *Any important circumstance which changes the nature of a sin.*

1. What will it avail us to confess some of our sins, and remain silent about others? Can we be purified from a part, and still retain the stains of the remainder? "All things are naked, and open to the eyes of him, to whom our speech is." (Hebr. 4:13.) "Pour out thy heart like water before the face of the Lord," says Jeremias (Lament. 2:19.) St. Bonaventure, commenting on this passage, remarks, that Jeremias has not said: We should pour out our hearts like oil, or blood, or milk, or wine; because of these, something always remains behind, either of the fluid itself, or of the color, or taste; but "like water," since that, on the contrary, flows out of a vessel without leaving any trace behind it. In a like manner, should we confess our sins.

2. Sometimes there are *circumstances connected with the sin* which quite alter its nature. For example, there is fornication, and adultery, and similar sins against holy purity, each one of which must be specified in confession. Thus the Catholic Church and the Council of Trent teach. There are other circumstances which greatly increase the guilt of a sin, thus, it is not the same degree of theft to steal one dollar, as to steal one thousand dollars. All these, and other attendant circumstances must be confessed by a *sincere* penitent. He who wishes to be perfectly cured, must make known to the physician, not only the sickness itself, but all the attendant symptoms characteristic of his malady.

III. Finally, the confession must be *an exact and particular declaration, not an excuse of our sins*; and we must

- I. *Confess only our own sins ; and*
- II. *Not confess the sins of our neighbors.*

1. "One must use no expressions," says St. Bonaventure, "which are calculated to palliate, or diminish his sins ; as those do who relate long histories before they come to the sin itself, and who are more disposed to excuse, than to accuse themselves." We have, in this case, much need to pray: "Incline not my heart to evil words ; to make excuses in sins," (Ps. 14: 4), as the workers of iniquity do. "For what is more wicked," exclaims St. Augustine, "than for the sinner to deny that he is a sinner, even when he is convicted of the sin, and can no longer deny it ? He will not acknowledge his guilt, and, because he excuses rather than accuses himself, he does not remember that instead of pardon, he deserves a fresh punishment. Such excuses may pass with men, but not with God ; as he cannot be deceived. Man must not excuse his sins, but candidly acknowledge them."

2. There are also many, who, in the confessional, are more ready to speak of the sins of their neighbors, than to confess their own. Have you not read, says St. Bernard, that the just man is his own accuser ? Take notice, that Holy Writ says : *his own accuser*, not that of some one else. Remember the words of St. James: "Confess, therefore, your sins one to another !" Observe that he says *your sins*, not another's. "I have acknowledged my sin to thee, and my injustice I have not concealed." (Ps. 31: 5.) *My sin, my injustice*, says the Psalmist, not that of another. We must confess our sins, not like Adam who laid the blame on Eve, nor like Eve who attributed her sin to the serpent, but we must accuse *ourselves*, and no other person. "I said I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord," *against myself*, says the Psalmist, and not against my neighbor.

Dearly beloved Christians, if you are now resolved to make a true, sincere, and generous confession of your sins, then "Go, show yourselves to the priests." (Luke 17: 14.) They will absolve you, and lead you back to your Saviour. You may then say of him : "Thou hast held me by my right hand : and by thy will thou hast conducted me, and with thy glory thou hast received me." (Ps. 72: 24.) You shall then enter with him into the heavenly Jerusalem, Christ in your heart, not on your back, as did the ass, mentioned in the present Gospel. Then, you can truly say to him : "I am become as a beast before thee : and I am always with thee." (Ps. 72: 23.) "For, is it not true," says St. Bernard, "that you are the animal upon whom, in a spiritual sense, Christ sits, who, conformably to the teaching of the Apostle, honor and bear God in your bodies ?" B.

PALM SUNDAY.

ON CANONICAL PENANCES.

“A very great multitude spread their garments in the way : and others cut down boughs from the trees, and strewed them in the way.” (Matt. 21: 8.)

To-day, we behold our Saviour entering Jerusalem in royal splendor, greeted by the loud acclamations of the people. According to the custom of the Orientals, some spread their garments in the way, others cut down branches of trees and strewed them in his path ; and the multitudes that preceded and followed him, cried out : “Hosanna to the Son of David : blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

In remembrance of this, the solemn entrance of Christ into Jerusalem—to-day, in our churches, palm-branches are blessed, distributed, and carried in procession. Herein, we behold one of the most imposing ceremonies of the whole ecclesiastical year. The palms are not blessed with simple and short prayers, but with benedictions of the first class, with many prayers and ceremonies closely resembling portions of the holy Mass. There is an Introit, for instance, an Epistle, Gradual, and Gospel ; as also a Preface and Sanctus, all of which precede the blessing of the palms. Then follow some beautiful ceremonies. Bearing the blessed palms, the solemn procession proceeds to the church-door, which is closed ; one part of the choristers remain with the priest outside of the church, while the others station themselves within. Thus stationed, they sing alternate verses of a hymn of praise and adoration to Christ their King and Redeemer. Thereafter, the deacon knocks at the church-door with the foot of the processional cross, the door opens and the holy Mass begins,—in which, for the first time, the Passion of our Lord is read.

The processional ceremonies are very ancient, and typify a beautiful thought, namely, that through the holy Cross of our Redeemer the prayers and desires of the world were heard and granted, and the gates of heaven (closed by sin) were again opened. The cross is, as you know, dear brethren, the emblem of penance, and since I have often spoken to you during the course of the Lenten season, urging

you to cultivate that humble contrition of heart suitable to the spirit of this day, on this, the last Sunday before Easter, I will close my exhortations by pointing out to you :

I. *The penitential discipline practised in the Catholic Church during the primitive ages ; and*

II. *The manner and cause of the alteration of such discipline in later times.*

I. Although the essence of Christian penance for the remission of sins has been the same in every century, still the external form of penance was, from the first century until far into the middle ages, so different from the practice of our own times, that we cannot look back upon those ages of fervor without sentiments of shame and consternation.

1. Proceeding in spirit to one of the early Christian churches, we behold certain men and women, standing or kneeling, at all seasons of the year, outside of the sacred portals. They appear in sackcloth and ashes, with pallid faces and dishevelled hair. Sighing and weeping, they implore the passers-by to intercede for them with the head of the church, so that they may be permitted once more to enter the sacred precincts.

Passing on to the interior of the church, we see near the door, or in some other place set apart for them, other rows of men and women. They lie prostrate upon the ground, or they stand in their places ; and pain and sorrow are depicted upon their faces and speak from their eyes. When the sermon is over, we see them cast themselves upon their knees, and beat their breasts. The bishop with all his attendants comes down from the sanctuary, and prays over them ; he addresses a few words to them, and they arise and leave the church. They are not permitted to assist at holy Mass.

“ Who are these men and women ? ” you ask me. They are the ancient penitents, who having fallen into grievous sins, must do penance for them according to the rules of the Church, before they can again be admitted to the communion of the faithful and the reception of the holy Sacraments.

2. According to the express teachings of Holy Writ, every sin draws after it its peculiar punishment ; and even though the sin be blotted out and forgiven in the holy Sacrament of Penance, the punishment due to it is not always remitted by the priest’s absolution, but according to the character and number of one’s sins, must be borne and suffered. This thought, upon which rests all Christianity, or the atone-

ment of Christ for the sins of the world, was a living one in the hearts of the first Christians, and it called forth the penitential discipline of that age. A remission of sins without a previous corresponding penance and punishment for them, was either not known at all in those days, or known only as an exception. There must be a proportion between the penance and the sin,—“The penance should not be lighter than the sin itself.” (St. Cyprian.)

Only for very secret sins was absolution given in the early ages before the corresponding satisfaction for them had been performed; in like manner, to the sick and dying was granted absolution immediately after the confession of their sins. But even for such sins which were revealed in auricular confession, the corresponding penance was not left to the free will of the sinner, but was appointed by the Church. Gladly and willingly, the first Christians accepted such canonical penances, in order to be reconciled to God, to make satisfaction for their sins, and, (free from their guilt and punishment), to be once more restored to the fellowship of the faithful. It seemed better to them to perform the severest penances, prescribed by the Church, than, without repentance, to be cast away from the presence of their God.

4. The greater and more grievous the sin, the heavier was the penance for it. The ancient Fathers and Doctors of the Church divided sins into three classes :

- a. *Those grave crimes by which great public scandal was given;*
- b. *Those which, although very grievous, were committed more privately;*
and
- c. *Light and trifling offenses, commonly called venial sins.*

5. In the first centuries, the manner of penitential discipline, as well as its duration, were not fixed by law. This was left in each church to the wisdom and judgment of the bishop or his representative. In the case of the incestuous Corinthian who was excluded from the Church by St. Paul, but who, after a short penance was again restored to membership, we see that the fervor of the penitent's zeal and contrition was the gauge by which the pastors of the different churches applied the law of canonical penance. But, by degrees, the whole system of penance was regulated by corresponding ecclesiastical law. Grievous sins and crimes demanding public ecclesiastical penance, were rare in the first two centuries of Christianity; hence, it was scarcely necessary then to lay down general laws on that head. St. Cyprian is the first of the Fathers of the Church who speaks of certain common ordinances respecting the punishment of the penitent and the length of its continuance. But these regard only the sin of apostasy

from the faith, and were merely a hint to the African bishops to receive again into the communion of the faithful those who had actually apostatized.

In the second half of the third century, however, men became more corrupt. There raged in those days not only continued persecutions, but also great civil revolutions; and the wars of the Persians, Goths, and other barbarous nations, devastated the Church, which was still languishing under the stroke of the tyrant. The schisms of Novatian and of Paul of Samosata, assailed her from within. The moral condition of the faithful grew worse, and the number of sinners daily increased more and more. The penitential canons which formerly dealt only with apostates, had to extend their limits. The multitude and variety of the scandals of those times made it necessary to adapt the Penances to the number and quality of the sins confessed. It behooved the Church to pass laws regulating her penitential discipline for the whole of Christendom, so that a uniform treatment of penitents might be observed, and limits set to the torrent of destruction which was inundating the world.

There were four grades through which the sinner, according to the number and grievousness of his sins, had to pass, before he could be again restored to the communion of the faithful, allowed to assist at the sacrifice of the Mass, and receive Communion. These were

a. The *Weepers*, who stood just outside the church-door, and with tears implored those who entered to intercede for them with the ecclesiastical superiors;

b. The *Hearers*, who stood in the vestibule, inside the first door of the church;

c. The *Prostrates*, who knelt among the Catechumens inside the church; and

d. The *Standers*, who stood erect in the midst of the assembled faithful.

a. The *Weepers*, according to St. Gregory, stood outside of the door of the vestibule of the church, and were not permitted to enter it, even for their protection in rough and stormy weather. Tertullian says expressly, when speaking of sins of impurity, which were included in the first class: "We do not remove such sinners merely from the church-doors, but from every covered building appertaining to the church, because they are not vicious sinners, but monsters of iniquity."

b. After the penitent had passed the appointed time in the first grade, he was admitted to the second, among the *Hearers*. He was permitted then to lay aside the garb of the penitent, unless he voluntarily desired to wear it. The place in which these penitents stood, was the inner court of the church. They were called *Hearers*, because they were allowed to remain during the instruction, the reading of the

holy Scriptures, and the sermon. After that, like the Catechumens, they were obliged to withdraw.

c. The third grade of penitents was that of *the Prostrates*. These were permitted to enter the door of the church, but had to remain in the lowest place. Fasting and mortification of the body, zealous, fervent prayer, and night-watches were prescribed for them. Certain priests were appointed to watch over their conduct, and their manner of fulfilling these penitential works. When the sermon was over, they approached the bishop and the clergy, and prostrating themselves at the entrance to the sanctuary, confessed their sins. Having received the imposition of hands and the blessing of the bishop, they were dismissed with encouraging exhortations to perseverance in penance. They were, however, permitted to be present at Mass.

d. After passing through this grade, they were admitted to the fourth class or *the Standers*. Therein, they laid aside all public tokens of grief and penance. They had their place behind the faithful, and were permitted to hear Mass, to join with the congregation in hymns of praise and thanksgiving, and to take part in the prayers of the Church, but, as yet, they were excluded from the reception of holy Communion. When the penitent had completed his appointed time in this grade of penance, he was absolved from sin and its punishment, and re-admitted to the holy Communion.

II. *In the course of time, the canonical discipline of the Church was gradually altered.* Already at the end of the fourth century, a change was introduced into the Eastern churches. Private penances superseded the earlier public ones. It was left to the zeal of individual penitents to perform the penitential works imposed upon them by the priests in satisfaction of their sins. Still the penitential exercises of those days continued very severe, and they bear no proportion to those of the present time. We find in the Eastern churches, many centuries later, the traces of the ancient penitential discipline. The primitive canonical penances continued longer in the Roman Church. In her, the four grades of penitents existed until the eighth century; and even if milder observances, in the course of time, prevailed, yet the old penitential ordinances and grades were not changed. From the eighth century, the ancient severity of penance disappeared; and private penances took the place of public ones.

From that period, the penitential ordinances assumed a new form, according to the character of the times. The moral standard of the faithful was gradually lowered. The migration of tribes which had overturned all existing order in most European countries; and the wandering to and fro of nations without home or country, had brought with it a frightful corruption of morals. The Church sought to inter-

pose her authority, and she held the nations, by threats of great punishments, to Christian order and morality. From the beginning of the seventh century, confession was entirely separated from the penitential ordinance. The Church instructed her priests to impose upon sinners, in confession, private penances.

The ancient grades of penance, in general, still remained in force at that time; but they assumed an altered form corresponding to the character of the period. The third grade, the class of *Prostrates*, which was so important in primitive times, entirely disappeared, and there remained only the other three grades of the so-called *Weepers*, *Hearers* and *Standers*. But aside from these penitential ordinances, grievous sins, at that time, were punished by the refusal of the holy Sacraments, and by the most rigorous fasts.

About the eleventh century, a substitute for the ancient ecclesiastical discipline came in vogue. Its means of reparation were not selected with a view of lightening the burden of ordinary practices of penance, but of aggravating them, and they were besides very varied in their character. One could satisfy the ecclesiastical penance by a rigorous fast; another, by scourging himself with a discipline. He who voluntarily inflicted on his flesh a certain number of blows could ransom himself from the canonical penances. In the thirteenth century, these *Flagellants*, as the latter were called, marched through cities and villages in great multitudes, and, singing the Penitential Psalms, scourged themselves with cords and sharp thorns unto blood. The Church was compelled to pronounce against these exhibitions of penance, inasmuch as the *Flagellants* declared such bloody practices to be necessary for the forgiveness of sin, and commanded by God.

Pilgrimages also took the place of ecclesiastical penance. The pilgrims wore iron bands around their bodies, on their necks, and on both arms, and were then sent forth to journey through the wide world. It was especially to great shrines, and to the holy See at Rome, that penitents travelled in order to receive the remission of their punishment. The penitential discipline of the epoch degenerated almost into inhumanity, and Church History relates punishments voluntarily inflicted on themselves by the penitents of those times, before which our soft-living Christians of the nineteenth century cannot but shudder. The easiest substitute for penance at that time was the embracing of the religious state. Entrance into a Religious Order was then esteemed a second baptism; and all sins and crimes were believed to be atoned for thereby.

Later still, came the Crusades. He who through devotion and for the purpose of wresting the Holy Land from the hands of the infidels, became a Crusader, received as his reward the remission of all ecclesiastical punishments. Prayer and almsdeeds were, also, regarded then

as substitutes for the canonical penances. Thence it came to pass that the ancient canonical penances of the Church were almost wholly abolished ; and from the twelfth century, they really ceased. Thenceforward, the priest imposed a penance in the confessional, and left it to the zeal and piety of each of the faithful, through voluntary penitential works, to make atonement for his or her sins. In her love and compassion for the weakness of her children, the Church, from that time forward, granted frequent and rich Indulgences in order to supply, through the merits of Jesus Christ, what is wanting to human tepidity and imperfection.

Two thoughts must impress themselves upon our minds when we consider the penitential canons in the different centuries. First, we must acknowledge that the essence of the holy Sacrament of Penance remained the same in all centuries, although the penance for sin varied. Confession, the avowal of sins, and their sacramental absolution, were the same in every century. Only the satisfaction for sin changed according to the character of the times. Nevertheless, it is with profound sorrow that we contemplate the change in penitential discipline ; and the gradual decline of the ancient canonical observances. Looking back upon the first centuries of Christianity up to the Middle Ages, behold how grievously we have fallen from our first zeal for penance. Will the few prayers and good works which we perform after confession, suffice to satisfy the justice of God for sins which formerly could only be atoned for by such rigorous and austere penances ? Must we not arouse ourselves to-day, to a greater zeal and fervor, striving to make satisfaction here on earth lest we be punished more severely in eternity ! A contrite and humbled heart, which atones for sin by voluntary penitential works, the Lord will not despise ; and that which we cannot accomplish through our own strength we may supply by the frequent gaining of Indulgences, by which the remission of the punishment due to our sins is granted to us. Amen.

BISHOP EHRLER.

GOOD FRIDAY.

THE GREATEST OF ALL SORROWS.

“O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow.” (Lament. 1: 12.)

I present to your pitying contemplation, this morning, my dear brethren, the mightiest, the most profound sorrow that earth has ever witnessed. It is not merely a single affliction, (such as is often endured by the human heart), but the sum of all suffering and woe, that fullness of all sorrow, united and enclosed in a single heart, and that heart, the sacred heart of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ ! The King of martyrs, our divine Redeemer, appears, to-day, before our minds in bloody garments, saying to us : “ Oh all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow.” Who will refuse to compassionate him, overwhelmed with the bitterest anguish for our salvation ? Who can live through this day, of all others in the year, without being penetrated by the most profound and sincere compassion for the mangled and martyred Lamb of God ?

Behold, how our holy Church, the Bride of the King of martyrs, laments for her beloved ! She can not find words to express her deep, sharp pain. Clad in the garments of mourning, with anguish in her countenance, and tears in her eyes, she sits before the Cross of her Bridegroom, and tenderly bewails his sufferings and death. To each of her children she cries out, to-day ; “ Let tears, like a torrent, run down day and night ; give thyself no rest, and let not the apple of thy eye cease. Arise, give praise in the night, in the beginning of the watches ; pour out thy heart like water before the face of the Lord.” (Lament. 2: 18, 19.)

The BITTER PASSION of Jesus should always and continually engage the contemplation of our souls. Day and night, like the blessed in heaven, should we adore the wounds of our Redeemer ; ever and always, should we weep with all holy souls over those sufferings which were borne for love of us. But to-day, my brethren, when all these agonies pass swiftly before our eyes, when the blood flows afresh, and the death-sweat oozes from his body, must not the stream of our tears, like a torrent, run down day and night ? Ah ! yes ; the Passion and Death of our dear Redeemer reveal to us this Good Friday morning the greatest and deepest of all sorrows.

- I. Because of the extreme torments suffered ;*
- II. Because of the person who endured those torments ; and*
- III. Because of the cruel cause of those torments.*

I. Who can fathom the depths and the bitterness of the deep sea of human anguish ? Who can count the tears that have been shed since the unhappy fall of Adam ? Who can reckon the cries of woe and misery, of agony and despair, that have issued from the mouth of one single suffering man ? Yet there has been no earthly sorrow which can even be compared with that of our Saviour. If all the pains and miseries of the whole earth were collected together and united in one great mass of anguish, the sufferings of our Redeemer would far outweigh them all. So immense, so profound, so overwhelming were they, that only the mighty heart of the God-Man could endure them.

1. The prophet Isaias beheld in a vision the future sufferings of the Messiah, and saw the holy Victim covered with blood and wounds ; but when he attempted to paint the picture of the King of Martyrs, O then, my brethren, he was bewildered by the terrible, the awe-inspiring apparition. “ Who hath believed our report ? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed ? He shall grow up as a tender plant before him, and as a root out of a thirsty ground ; there is no beauty in him, nor comeliness ; and we have seen him, and there was no sightliness, that we should be desirous of him ; despised, and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity.” (Is. 53 : 1-3).

“ A worm, and no man ; the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people,” (Ps. 21 : 7.), our Lord Jesus Christ has suffered all the pains which the soul can suffer. He has borne the excess of mental sufferings, such as anguish and fear, sorrow and desolation, dejection and dereliction—all that can inflict torture upon the heart of man. He cries out : “ My soul is sorrowful even unto death” (Matt 14: 34.); and then he sinks to the earth overcome by so fierce an agony that it forces a bloody sweat to issue from every pore of his sacred body. Each separate torment which he afterward endured in all the members of his body, he consented to suffer beforehand in his heart and soul. “ Where is there a grief like unto my grief ? ”

2. Yes, my brethren, he suffered in every member of his sacred body. “ From the sole of the foot to the top of the head, there is no soundness therein ; wounds and bruises and swelling sores : they are not bound up, nor dressed, nor fomented with oil.” (Is. 1 : 6.) His head is crowned with piercing thorns ; his eyes are filled with blood that streams from his wounded brow ; his cheeks are bruised by the blows of a wicked servant ; his hands and feet are pierced

through with cruel nails ; his heart is opened with a spear ; his shoulders are torn with terrible lashes, and all his wounds are inflamed and widened by the repeated taking-off and putting-on of his sacred garments. "Where is there any sorrow like to my sorrow ?"

He endured every kind of affliction—his bitter chalice contained every form and species of woe. As a babe, he was repulsed by his own creatures, and forced to accept as a birth-place, a cold and miserable stable. As a helpless and harmless child, he was threatened with death, and obliged to flee from his own country into a distant and barbarous land. When grown to manhood, his chosen people, to whom he had shown naught but kindness, whom he had loaded with favors and benefits, despised and persecuted him. They said : "He hath a devil," and they sought to take his life. They tried to rob him of his honor and reputation. He was betrayed by one of his own disciples, and sold by him for a contemptible sum of money, and this under the mask of friendship. He was deserted by his cherished disciples, who had sworn to follow him unto death. He was bound with cords, and led forth like a criminal amid the wild clamor of his enemies. He was falsely accused, and dragged about from one tribunal to another. He was mocked and despised ; a murderer and robber was preferred before him. He was deprived of his clothing before the eyes of the whole people, and thus, stripped naked, was nailed to the cross ; and even on the cross he was scoffed at and denied unto the end. Indifference and cowardice, human respect and treachery, hypocrisy, derision, malice, in fact, every kind of evil, had a share in his torments. "Where is there any sorrow like to my sorrow ?"

He suffered from every class of men, priests and laymen, princes upon their thrones, and the scum of the people ; strangers who knew him not, and those of his own race ; pagans who persecuted him through ignorance, and Jews who had been instructed in the Law ; soldiers hardened by cruel warfare, and judges who were appointed to protect the innocent ; the ignorant who were the blind tools of the malignant Pharisees, and the learned who were filled with evil wisdom—all conditions of human society, all degrees of rank, became his enemies. He had not one executioner alone (as has the greatest criminal), but hundreds and thousands of them. "Where is sorrow like unto my sorrow ?"

He suffered throughout his whole earthly career, since no moment of it was free from pain and affliction. All the days of his life, the awful vision of his future sufferings stood out clearly before his omniscient eye, filling his soul with unspeakable woe and dread. Death itself did not put an end to the outrages heaped upon him ; for when he hung lifeless upon the cross, his enemies continued to wreak their vengeance upon his sacred remains. They pierced his side with a

lance ; they sealed up his grave and placed a watch upon it so that “*that deceiver*,” as they called him, might not come forth from the tomb. Jesus, as St. John remarks, knew “all things that were to come upon him.” (John 18:4.) “My sorrow is continually before me,” the Psalmist says in his person. (Ps. 37:18.) “My enemies have trodden on me all the day long ; for there are many that make war against me.” (Ps. 55:3.)

3. *Where is there sorrow equal to his sorrow?* He suffered all these pains and sorrows from those who had been his friends, and for whose salvation he had descended from heaven to earth. His people, chosen before all the nations of the earth, whom he had led out of Egypt, fed with manna in the desert, opened the fountain of living water in the hard rock ; whose enemies he had subdued, through whose cities, towns, and villages he went about blessing and doing good—this, his chosen people, prepared all these afflictions and humiliations for him, their Messiah. “The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib ; but Israel hath not known me.” (Is. 1:3.) “I have brought up children, and exalted them, but they have despised me.” (Is. 1:2.) Hearing these lamentations of our outraged God, must we not again exclaim : What sorrow is like unto his sorrow !

4. He endured all these sufferings without the least alleviation. No earthly consolation was offered him, for his disciples had all fled ; no heavenly comfort was sent to lighten his pain. He offered himself willingly to suffer, and he wished to drink the bitter chalice even to the dregs. For this reason, he refrained himself as far as possible from the succors of his Divinity, so that he might be, as it were, abyssed in the very depths of sorrow. “I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the Gentiles there was not a man with me.” (Is. 63:3.) “I looked for one that would grieve together with me, but there was none ; and for one that would comfort me, and I found none. And they gave me gall for my food ; and in my thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink.” (Ps. 68:21, 22.)

In heart-felt sympathy, my brethren, let us, to-day, contemplate this deep ocean of suffering, for to nothing else can the great and bitter sorrows of our Redeemer be compared. “Let tears like a torrent run down day and night : give thyself no rest, and let not the apple of thy eye cease.” The earth, the elements, and all inanimate nature once trembled on this day with grief and compassion for the mangled Lamb of God, and shall we, for whose salvation he was slain, alone remain indifferent ? Let us fall upon our knees before our crucified Jesus,—

let us venerate his sorrows, and detest with bitter tears the sins which caused his unspeakable sufferings.

II. Consider next, my beloved Christians, *the dignity of the Person who endured those sufferings.*

1. Who is this Man of Sorrows who appears before us, with torn and bleeding body and pierced heart? "Who is he that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bosra?" we ask in astonishment with the prophet Isaias. (Is. 63:1.) "Why then is thy apparel red, and thy garments like theirs that tread the wine-press?" (Is. 63:2.) No human heart is strong or heroic enough to carry such a burden of sorrow, without being crushed, broken, annihilated! Ah, my beloved, the Man of Sorrows is the only-begotten Son of God—the strong and mighty Deity, who, for love of us, has borne all these torments; who, in order to make satisfaction for our sins, took their crushing weight upon himself and suffered in our stead. He, the Man of Sorrows, saw the want and misery of the earth, he saw the corruption of sin which had opened the abyss of hell, and closed the gates of heaven. From the throne of his heavenly glory, he looked down with grief upon the earth, and saw that only his own almighty hand could rescue it from its extreme and hopeless wretchedness. The prayers and sacrifices of centuries had been inadequate to appease the divine wrath. Neither Angel nor Archangel could make the requisite satisfaction to the offended majesty of God, or deliver the world from its impending ruin. Penetrated with an incomprehensible love, the Divine Word cries out to his heavenly Father: "Sacrifice and oblation thou wouldest not; but a body thou hast fitted to me . . . then said I, behold I come . . . that I should do thy will, O Lord!" (Heb. 10:5-7.) "The Father did not lay the cross upon his Son without his consent," says St. Cyril, "but the Son has given himself for us on the cross, and the father has agreed to it, so that the mystery of salvation might be accomplished." (St. Cyril.)

2. The Man of Sorrows bore within him *a divine heart*, and he suffered with the strength and supernatural power of a divine being. It is true that while he suffered intensely in his human nature, the divine nature was incapable of suffering, yet the divine, being united with the human nature, could not but sympathize with the sufferings of the latter. Indeed, Christ as God wished to sympathize with and share the sufferings of his humanity, so that, thereby, a sacrifice of infinite value might be offered to his Heavenly Father, as an infinite atonement for our sins. Where is there a sorrow like unto this sorrow?

Go through all the ranks of human beings, my dear Christians, and

contemplate the misery which meets you on every side. Ponder well the greatest sorrow that has ever been the portion of any earthly creature, and you will acknowledge, after all, that it is only the suffering of a human heart. For all its depth and intensity it is only the trembling outcry and complaint of a finite human soul. But the sorrow which Jesus Christ endured, contains within its unfathomable depths—the unsearchable emotions of an incarnate God! Again : were it possible for the Angels of heaven to experience pain ; nay, more, if they accepted it with the whole power of their angelic nature, the united sufferings of all that multitude of mighty spirits compared with those of our Redeemer, would be only as a soft sigh which trembles for a moment on the summer air. Where is sorrow like unto *his* sorrow ?

3. Behold, again, this Man of Sorrows, and meditate upon the lessons of his wounds. Consider not merely that grand, divine Heart which bears human suffering with superhuman strength, but, if you would still further sound the depths of Christ's excessive sorrow, contemplate, also, that sacred body which is led like a lamb to the slaughter. Not a human body formed from base and sinful dust of the earth is the body of Jesus Christ, but a miracle of the omnipotence and wisdom of God. It is a wonderful creation formed by the Holy Ghost in the immaculate womb of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. Not merely royal blood flows through his veins, the tender plant from the root of Jesse, but this body is created by the divine operation of God himself. As all the works of God are more perfect, the clearer and the more forcibly they show forth his power ; as the manna which the Lord sent from heaven was sweeter and more exquisite than any earthly food ; as the wine which our Saviour created at the marriage of Cana was finer than any juice of the vine ; as Adam, the first man, had a most beautiful and perfect human body, because God himself had formed it from the slime of the earth—so the body of Jesus Christ was more wondrously beautiful and perfect than that of any other human being. It was fine and delicate and perfect beyond all creatures, and formed with special capabilities for suffering. He was appointed to be the Lamb of God, to bear, and to take away, the sins of the world. According to the will of God, as well as through the nature of his holy body, the humanity of our Redeemer must have felt all his pains and sorrows much more keenly and intensely than could any other human body. The greatest and sharpest agony struggled and raged in the most sensitive and delicate of vessels ; but through the will of God and the love of our Saviour, the vessel, not being able to break, endured and felt that extraordinary anguish to the bitter end. The fiercest fire, finding the most inflammable material, continues, without consuming or annihilating it, to feed upon it with ever increasing vio-

lence, as long as divine Justice requires the holocaust ! Where is there a sorrow like unto this sorrow ?

4. "Go forth, ye daughters of Sion ; and see King Solomon in the diadem wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals." (Cant. 3:11.) Behold your Bridegroom, who has delivered you through such exceeding sorrow, and has espoused himself to your soul at such a great price ! Not only will we fall down in adoration and extol the sufferings of our Redeemer, but lovingly we will raise up our eyes to the King and Bridegroom of our souls, and gratefully consecrate the love of our hearts to him, the Incarnate God, who has given the whole of his divine and human nature to suffer for our redemption !

III. Come now, my dearly beloved, and descending once more into the deep abyss of our Saviour's Passion, let us search with sincere earnestness for *the cause of these terrible sufferings*, this ineffable sorrow ?

1. *On account of our sins*, my brethren, the Son of God came down from the glory of heaven. A great invalid lay suffering upon the earth, and a great Physician must needs appear to save and heal him. Love moved the good Samaritan Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, to take pity on sick humanity, and to offer to his heavenly Father the atonement for our sins. But was it necessary that our Saviour should suffer so much and so deeply ? Would not a single sigh from his divine Heart have sufficed to appease the wrath of the Eternal Father ? Certainly ; one single drop of his precious blood was sufficient to cleanse the whole world from sin. A single work of our divine Saviour is everlasting and infinite in its redeeming power. Then, wherefore, has he borne the supreme measure of sorrow ? Why did he wish to drain the bitter chalice to the dregs ? It was to expiate our sins in general, as well as in particular. Every sin that has been or will be committed upon the earth he, in his character of Mediator, has atoned for. "Behold the man," cried out Pilate, as he presented the scourged and bleeding Redeemer to the gaze of the Jewish people. "O, Pilate !" we must exclaim, "thou hast announced a deep truth !" Before us stands the Man who has taken upon himself all the sins of the human race, and who bears them and atones for them in his own body. Before us stands the Man in whom we can see our sins and their punishment. "Surely he hath borne our infirmities, and carried our sorrows ; and we have thought him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our iniquities, he was bruised for our sins ; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his bruises we are healed." (Is. 53: 4, 5.)

2. Contemplate, to-day, the sufferings of our Saviour, my beloved brethren, and see if there is one sin which he has not taken upon himself and expiated. Consider first, our individual sins, and in them you will recognize all the sins of the world. Faithless and ungrateful, humanity has turned away from the the good God, and bartered his friendship and love for the miserable wages of sin. The disciples, fleeing, abandon their divine master ; Judas betrays him for thirty pieces of silver ; his enemies take him prisoner, and bind him like a criminal ; they drag him from one tribunal to another. *Behold the man* who continues in his vices, who is not satisfied with one sin or one insult to the Lord ! They weave a crown of thorns and press it upon his head ; they place a reed in his hand, and clothe him in a garment of mockery. *Behold the man* who raises his head proudly and haughtily, who would elevate his throne as high as the stars in heaven ! They scourge him with cruel lashes, until his sacred body, which is exposed naked to the gaze of the rabble, is covered with blood. *Behold the man* who shamelessly wallows in the lusts of the flesh, rejoicing in them, and defiling his body with the filth of iniquity. Pilate releases a murderer, and condemns innocence to death. *Behold the man* who, full of envy, and jealousy, grudges his neighbor his position, or his fortune. They pierce his hands and feet with cruel nails. *Behold the man* who misuses his members for sin, whose feet hasten upon the road to ruin, and whose hands are greedily stretched forth towards injustice. They give him gall and vinegar to drink. *Behold the man* who indulges in gluttony, and gratifies all his sensual appetites ! They mock him in his sufferings, and cry out to him : " If thou art the Son of God, come down from the cross !" *Behold the man* who, in his anger, knows no limit to his hatred and revenge ! In death, they pierced his Sacred Heart ; and at the same time they pierced the soul of the man who had given away his heart to strange gods. *Behold the man of sin ! Behold the man of punishment !* " It is not the Redeemer and the Saviour," each one of us might exclaim, " that hangs before me upon the cross, it is I myself whose sins he has borne and atoned for, it is the man of sin that is crucified in him ! "

" What was the cause of thy suffering, O Son of God ? " exclaims St. Anselm. " *I* was the scourge of thy pain ; *I* the cause of thy death ; *I* the sting of thy torments ; *I* the ground of thy condemnation. O marvelous verdict, O mysterious dispensation ! The wicked sin, and the just is punished ; the guilty commit the offense, and the innocent atones for it ; the master pays for what the servant has broken ; God becomes surety for the debts of man."

3. Wherein lies the cause of all these incomprehensible sufferings of our Saviour ? He did not wish merely to bear all the sins of the world

in his afflicted person, but, also, to make an everlasting and superabundant satisfaction for us, in order to lay up for us an everlasting and superabundant merit. "Christ has paid much more than we owed," says St. Chrysostom ; "as much as the ocean exceeds a drop of water, so much do Christ's merits exceed our guilt." (Hom. 20 in Epist. *ad. Rom.*) This superabounding merit of Christ does not merely blot out all the stains of sin and its punishment in us, but it, also, wins for us in the richest measure all the graces necessary to our souls for the gaining of everlasting life. As the good Samaritan did not merely raise up the wounded man from the wayside, and wash his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, but, also, out of love, placed him upon his horse, and brought him to an inn, and left money for his further care, so our Redeemer, the genuine Good Samaritan, does not simply heal the wounds of our hearts through his atonement ; but, also, gives us, through his holy Passion, all graces in the highest degree. He would reveal to the world his everlasting love and its great power ; therefore has he suffered so much for us. As the loving pelican opens its breast and gives its own life-blood to feed its famishing brood, so does Jesus, our *Pious Pelican*, nourish and strengthen our souls with his own sacred Blood, the last drop of which he shed for us.

To-day, then, my beloved brethren, let us descend into the holy mystery of the Passion of our Lord. And when we have gone down into the deep well whence such streams of suffering and sorrow burst forth, each one of us may strike his breast remorsefully, and cry out to himself in bitter sorrow : "Thou art the cause of all these innumerable sufferings of thy Redeemer !" Our sins have prepared these pains for our loving Saviour. Therefore "let tears, like a torrent, run down day and night : give thyself no rest, and let not the apple of thine eye cease." To-day, at least, dear Christians, let us pour out our hearts like water before the face of the Lord. When King David learned and recognized of old the justice of God in his family, and when the punishing hand of the Lord was revealed to him, then that royal penitent "kept a fast, and going in by himself, lay upon the ground. And the ancients of his house came to make him rise from the ground, but he would not : neither did he eat meat with them." (2 Kings 12: 16, 17.) So let us spend in the holy practice of prayer and penance this solemn day, in which the Justice and the Mercy of God have been so clearly revealed to us : and let us promise the Lord, my dear brethren, at the foot of his cross that, henceforth, we will never again renew his endless sufferings, and unspeakable sorrows, by any future relapses into sin. Amen.

BISHOP EHRLER.

EASTER SUNDAY.

THE TWO-FOLD RESURRECTION OF MAN.

“He is risen.” (Mark 16 : 6.)

The Gospel of to-day relates to us the glorious Resurrection of our crucified Redeemer, a sublime mystery which not only redounds to his greater honor, but, also to our joy and benefit. To-day Christ has conquered death, he whom death has slain becomes in turn the slayer of death, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Osee: “O death, I will be thy death !” (Osee 13 : 14.) The Author of Life could not long remain under the dominion of death. Therefore was he placed in a new sepulchre, because he was not of the number of those of whom it is written, “Their sepulchres shall be their houses forever.” (Ps. 48 : 12.) The Conqueror of death had no grave of his own, says St. Ambrose, because he had not long to remain in the tomb, but was to leave it almost immediately. “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell ; nor wilt thou give thy holy one to see corruption,” says the Psalmist. (Ps. 15 : 10.) Dearly beloved, have we also a share in this Resurrection ? Doubtless we have. St. Augustine declares that man has a two-fold Resurrection :

- I. *A resurrection of the soul ; and*
- II. *A resurrection of the body.*

This latter resurrection can only take place in the world to come, but the former must be accomplished in this world. To-day, we will make these two truths the subject of our meditation.

I. The resurrection of the spirit is effected,

1. By *faith*, and
2. By *penance*.

I. There is a resurrection by *faith*,—faith, which is the life of the soul, even as the soul is the life of the body. Without the soul, the body is merely an inert lifeless mass of clay ; and, without faith the soul is devoid of all supernatural life. “For the beginning of life is faith,” and as St. Paul says: “The just man liveth by faith.” (Gal. 3 : 11.) “Dost thou not see,” says St. Bernard, “that faith is life, and a reflection and figure of the life to come ?” On the contrary, a mere sensual life, without faith, is death. The testimony of St. Paul again

confirms this : " She that liveth in pleasures is dead while she is living." (Tim. 5 : 6.) And again he says : " The wisdom of the flesh is death." (Rom. 8 : 6.) Yes, it is a reflection and a figure of a still more fearful death ; an eternal death.

2. It would, indeed, be happiness for us if, after our first resurrection, by faith, we should die no more in the spirit ; but, alas ! the great mass of men soon lose the white robe of baptismal innocence by mortal sin. In his infinite mercy and compassion a loving God has instituted for such the holy Sacrament of Penance, which may truly be called the second resurrection of the soul : " Behold, this child is set for the ruin, and for the resurrection of many." (Luke 2 : 34.) St. Bonaventure adds to these words : " This resurrection takes place when we arise from our grievous sins :" and St. Chrysostom denominates this resurrection a new life through which the impure become chaste, the avaricious, generous, the wrathful, meek and gentle. Our Saviour has suffered and " was delivered up for our sins," but he also, " rose again for our justification," (Rom. 4 : 25) so that after our resurrection from sin, we may " walk in the newness of life," (Rom. 6 : 4) and no longer suffering spiritual death, but may resemble Christ our Lord who, " rising again from the dead, dieth now no more." Rom. 6 : 9.)

II. The resurrection of the body will be either for,

1. *Eternal happiness* ; or,
2. *Eternal misery*.

1. It is an undeniable truth of faith that all flesh shall rise again at the Last Day to appear in judgment before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ. " He that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead, shall quicken also your mortal bodies." (Rom. 8 : 11.) " For the trumpet shall sound ; and the dead shall rise again incorruptible ; and we shall be changed." : (1 Cor. 15 : 52). This doctrine has animated all the Saints to lead a pious and holy life, " For this corruptible must put on incorruption: and this mortality must put on immortality." (1 Cor. 15 : 53.) Soul and body having been joint sharers in the trials and sufferings of this life shall be also, please God, co-heirs in the eternal inheritance of the next. Holy Job, in the midst of his poverty and afflictions, was greatly comforted and encouraged by the consideration of his future resurrection : " For I know that my Redeemer liveth," he says, " and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth." (Job. 19 : 25.)

2. But, do the wicked anticipate this resurrection with feelings of joy? Certainly not. As the life has been, so also will the resurrection

be. "We shall all indeed rise again : but we shall not all be changed." (1 Cor. 15 : 51.) That is : "They that have done good, shall come forth unto the resurrection of life ; but they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgement ;" for the resurrection of the sinner brings with it eternal death, rather than everlasting life. "Their worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished." (Mark, 9 : 43.) Those who have not lived according to the Spirit of God, shall not, on rising from the dead undergo that glorious change of body which awaits the faithful servant of the Lord. They shall appear before the whole world in their true colors—black, hideous and corrupt ! O, if we would only meditate more frequently upon the awful resurrection of the sinner, surely we would not lead such careless, sinful lives ! Filled with fear and consternation, the wicked, at the last day, shall cry out to the mountains : "Fall on us !" and to the hills : "Cover us !" They would choose rather to be eternally dead and buried from sight, than be compelled, (as they shall be) to rise again to everlasting punishment.

My dear Christians ! consider well this two-fold resurrection. Remember, God is not mocked. "For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption : but he that soweth in the Spirit, of the Spirit, shall reap life everlasting." (Gal. 6 : 8.) You are already risen again through faith by holy Baptism in Christ. If you still, (praise be to God !) retain your baptismal innocence, stand fast, I implore of you in your holy vows and resolutions, and preserve your white robes, unspotted ; but, if, unfortunately, you have fallen into grievous sin, and suffered a spiritual death, then rise up again through holy Penance, and persevere in this second resurrection until the end of life. "Behold now is the acceptable time ; behold now is the day of salvation." (2. Cor. 6 : 2.) There are some Christians, it is true, so ill-disposed that, through the whole season of Lent, they look forward impatiently to the coming of Easter, merely that they may then more freely indulge themselves in sensual pleasures. The resurrection of our Saviour affords them only fresh opportunities of relapsing into their old sins. On Easter Sunday, they re-commence their feasting and drinking, their impure and sinful pleasures ; they give free rein to their sensual desires ; as if Christ had risen again for this base purpose, and not for our justification. Ah ! my dearly beloved ! go not in the way of these miserable, carnal men ! Keep the true Easter of the devout Christian, and since by the grace of God, you are now risen again, persevere in this holy state : otherwise perhaps, you may fall again, to rise in Christ no more !

B.

EASTER SUNDAY.

THE GLORY OF THE RISEN SAVIOUR.

“He is risen, he is not here.” (Mark 16: 6.)

The Resurrection of Christ is the best proof of his divinity, the strongest seal of his doctrines, the pledge of our redemption, the figure of our spiritual, and the guarantee of our corporal resurrection. Therefore all the circumstances of his Resurrection are of the greatest importance. We confine ourselves, however, to the explanation of a few words addressed by the angel to the women who had come to the sepulchre : “ You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified ; he is risen, he is not here.” As by dying on the Cross Jesus showed himself a real man, so by rising again from the dead he showed himself to be

- I. *The true God* ;
- II. *The strong God* ; and
- III. *The merciful God*.

I. Although Jesus was born, lived and died in the humble form of man, the rays of his divinity shone forth so brilliantly from the very depths of his poverty and lowliness, that the world could not but acknowledge him as the King of glory, the Son of God to whom the Father said before the creation of the world : “ Thou art my son, this day I have begotten thee.” (Ps. 2: 7.)

I. In his fulfilment of the predictions of the Prophets, in the signs and wonders which he wrought in the order of nature and grace,—he proved himself as God. But the most convincing and incontestable proof of his divinity is his glorious Resurrection from the dead. This was attested by our Saviour himself : “ Master, we would see a sign from thee,” said the Scribes and Pharisees to him on a certain occasion. But he answering said to them : “ An evil and adulterous generation seeketh for a sign, but a sign shall not be given to it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For, as Jonas was in the whale’s belly three days and three nights, so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.” (Matt. 12: 39, 40.) He calls his resurrection his last and greatest miracle. Israel could have been saved yet by a belief in this sign ; but when the nation refused to

believe in this last and greatest miracle, all hope of salvation was lost. It was not possible for the Lord to work a greater miracle, and to give to the world a stronger proof of his divinity. Therefore he added : The men of Ninive shall rise in judgment against this generation, and shall condemn it, because they did penance at the preaching of Jonas ; and behold a greater than Jonas is here. Again when he drove the buyers and sellers out of the temple, and they questioned his authority, saying : " What sign dost thou show us, seeing thou doest these things ? Jesus answered, and said to them : " Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (John 2: 18, 19.) His body is the visible temple of God, its rebuilding (resurrection) according to our Lord's words, is as great and convincing a miracle, as if, granting that the Jews had destroyed the temple of Jerusalem, he had rebuilt in three days what it had taken forty-six years to erect.

2. The Prophets had wrought miracles heretofore, but only by the order and power of God. They had even raised the dead to life. But to free one's self from the shackles of death, to restore life to one's own defunct body, *that* belongs only to him who can say and has said : " *I am the resurrection and the life.*" (John 11: 25.) " I am the first and the last, and alive ; and behold I am living forever, and have the keys of death and of hell." (Apoc. 1: 18.) " Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (in the grave), nor wilt thou give thy holy one to see corruption," (Ps. 15:10,) exclaims the Psalmist, when he beheld in joyful ecstasy the Resurrection of the Lord and in it the shining seal of his divinity.

3. No miracle was ever so firmly established and confirmed. All the Apostles unanimously proclaimed it. Our Saviour appeared upon ten different occasions to them, and to the five hundred brethren assembled together. They not only saw him plainly with their eyes, but he also allowed them to touch him with their hands ; he ate before them, in order to convince them that he was really arisen in the flesh. Even his enemies were compelled against their will to testify to the truth of his Resurrection. They had rolled a heavy stone against the entrance of the sepulchre, put the seal of public authority upon it, and placed a guard around it. But the broken seal, the rolled-away stone, the empty tomb, the affrighted guard are proofs of the Resurrection of the Lord. In vain did these miserable men have recourse to lies in order to weaken or destroy these proofs. The Lord in his wisdom, has surrounded this miracle of Resurrection with so many testimonies, that doubt and unbelief dare not assail or subvert this corner-stone of our faith.

4. Behold the change which takes place in the Apostles on learning the Resurrection of their Master ! Are not the courage, the faith and the joyous zeal which they manifest, also a convincing proof of this truth. Whilst the dead Christ reposed in the tomb, they were dejected and inconsolable. Their faith and hope rested upon a weak and unstable foundation. Already like the disciples who went to Emmaus they began to think of leaving Jerusalem, the centre of their past hopes and expectations. But hardly had they heard of the Resurrection of their Lord, when a new life was infused into them. "We have seen the Lord," (John 20: 25)—they exclaimed to each other. Every symptom of doubt and dejection had disappeared ; no longer weak or timid, they were now strong, resolute, brave-hearted men ready to suffer torture and death for their Master.

5. The enemies of our Lord, however, were completely crushed and dispirited. Those stiff-necked men who refused to believe in him, and who, in the wickedness of their hearts, had crucified him, having beheld him dead upon the cross, and laid in the sepulchre, fully believed that they had annihilated him. Now, O confusion, they are forced to gaze upon him in all his risen glory and majesty. The miracle of his Resurrection, which they could not deny, covered them with deep disgrace and shame, like that which covered the guilty brethren of the ancient Joseph when they beheld their much-injured brother not only alive and free, but arrayed in all the glory and power of the governor of Egypt.

II. The God of truth appears to us in his Resurrection also as a *God of strength*. The Resurrection was a complete victory over

1. *Sin.*
2. *Death, and*
3. *Hell.*

1. Up to the hour of our Redeemer's death upon the cross sin had ruled the universe like a cruel taskmaster. The disobedience of our first parents had borne its bitter and wide-spread fruit. "As by one man sin entered into this world, and by sin, death, so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned." (Rom. 5: 19.) The whole earth was covered with sin as with a net. The countless prayers and sacrifices of Jew and Gentile ascended, alike, in vain to heaven. Nothing human could break down the immense power of the devil. Jesus had been promised to the world as a Redeemer from sin. The seed of a woman shall crush the serpent's head, said God in the beginning, and it shall lie in wait for her heel. "Thou shall call his

name Jesus," said the angel to Joseph, for he shall *save his people from their sins.*" (Matt. 1: 21.) What God had predicted, the Saviour fulfilled. In his bitter Passion and death he made ample satisfaction for our guilt.

2. The strong God and mighty conqueror also destroyed with sin its most fatal earthly consequences and punishment—*death*. All the ills and miseries which God, in his justice, has inflicted on men find their climax in death,—death of the body and death of the soul. He who was to take away the sins of the world, had therefore to conquer death. "He shall cast down death headlong forever." (Ps. 25: 8.) "I will deliver them out of the hand of death. I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be thy death." (Osee 13:14.)

Our Saviour has really and truly "cast death down headlong forever." He has set his heel upon him like a conqueror. Death had no power over him. It led him only to glory and incorruptibility. He is the first fruit of the risen ones, who in his Resurrection overcame and conquered death. "O death! where is thy victory! Where is thy sting, O death? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who hath given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1. Cor. 15: 55-57.) Not only did Christ raise the dead to life several times during his sojourn upon earth, thus overcoming death in the person of his creatures, but he celebrated in his own resurrection complete victory over death. We may, therefore, exclaim, to-day, with great joy in the language of the Scripture: "Death is swallowed up in victory." (1 Cor. 15: 54.)

3. As the God of strength, our Lord has, also, vanquished *eternal death*—HELL. Through sin and death Satan ruled the world. He was the strong man keeping his court. Christ did not content himself with merely snatching the scepter from this audacious usurper of his throne, or with taking away his armor, wherein he trusted—he must also set his foot upon his neck, and overcoming him, crush the serpent's head. This great work was consummated by his Resurrection, when he chained the Evil One and preserved him for judgment. It was not enough to combat the kingdom of Satan, or to expel him and his demons out of men, but "divesting principalities and powers he made a show of them, triumphing openly over them in himself." (Col. 2: 15.) Through death he destroyed him, "who had the empire of death, that is to say, the devil." (Hebr. 2: 14.) "He hath broken gates of brass, and burst iron bars." (Ps. 106: 16.)

III. Finally, Christ, in his Resurrection, appears to us as the *God of mercy*. In his luminous body, arising from the gloomy sepulcher, we

behold the blessed certainty of our own spiritual resurrection, the guarantee of the forgiveness of our sins; the pledge of our eternal life! "If Christ be not risen again, your faith is vain, for you are yet in your sins." (1 Cor. 15: 17.) The forgiveness of our sins rests assuredly upon the atoning death of Christ. Our supreme consolation lies in his holy Passion, and in the fullness of all graces in life and death. "And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." (1 John 2: 2.)

1. In the victory of Christ, we celebrate our own; and we feel confident that, once risen from the grave, he has left behind him, in the darkness and silence of the tomb, the handwriting that stood against us, the terrible record of our guilt. If the words of the Church: "I absolve thee from thy sins," derive their efficacy from the death of our Saviour on the cross, his resurrection is the seal of their power and mercy.

2. Another equally consoling truth of our holy faith, *our own resurrection*, rests upon the sublime mystery which we celebrate to-day. The hope of immortality and of eternal life, has been the solace of all times and nations. Be it ever so deeply sunken in paganism, mankind never completely lost this cheering faith; sin could never entirely efface it from the human soul.

Jesus spoke of this hope and taught this truth in the clearest manner. "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, although he be dead, shall live. And every one that liveth and believeth in me, shall not die forever." (John 11: 25, 26.) He calls himself the dispenser of life, who carries life within him, and who has the power to communicate it to all who believe in him. He calls himself the author of the resurrection. "As the Father raiseth up the dead and giveth life; so the Son also giveth life to whom he will." (John 5: 21.) He has the same power and omnipotence as his Father. He can reanimate the dead. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by me." (14: 6.) He bears within him the life which truly leads to the Father. Our Saviour has strongly confirmed this hope of our resurrection by all the graces he has deposited in his Church. All the holy Sacraments which he has instituted for our salvation, assure us of this; for they sanctify and consecrate our souls and bodies; especially, the most adorable Sacrament of the Altar, which pours into our being a divine life, and implants in us the germ of immortality.

3. "The first of the risen ones," what he has once accomplished in himself, he will perform in all who are united with him by holy faith.

They shall all follow him, the first among many brethren. And, if our Saviour has raised us up to be members of his own mystical body, shall we not follow our Head and Chief in his Resurrection? Shall the members be separated from the Head, or shall the Head live without the members? "He that raised up Jesus Christ from the dead," says St. Paul, "shall quicken also your mortal bodies, because of his Spirit dwelling in you." (Rom. 8: 2.) "Who will reform the body of our lowness, made like to the body of his glory." (Phil. 3: 21.) Our resurrection from the dead stands as an established fact, as an absolute certainty, before the mind of the Apostle, who exclaims: "He who has awakened Jesus Christ from the dead, will make your dead bodies alive again."

But, my brethren, we must celebrate here upon earth, a thorough resurrection from our sins, if we expect to imitate our Lord in a final resurrection from the dead. Can he who is the slave of sin ever expect that glorious resurrection? The grace and love of Jesus can not but depart from a soul in which the devil dwells. The resurrection of our Lord is, therefore, the most powerful warning and beautiful symbol of our own moral resurrection.

As our Saviour raised himself from the tomb free from the fetters of death, so let us, also, arise from the grave of sin, and walk in the newness of life. Let us live, like him, in a glorified manner; with renovated souls and holy dispositions. The marvelously beautiful image of the Risen Christ should ever be the Christian's model. And, as our Lord, after he had overcome death, died no more nor returned into his tomb, so let us never again lose the life of grace which, in his mercy, he has infused into our souls, but "mind the things that are above;" until we arise, like our King and Lord, clothed with the beauty of immortality, and girded with heavenly glory, to the mansions of eternal bliss!

BISHOP EHRLER.

LOW SUNDAY.

ON TRUE CHRISTIAN PEACE.

“Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them: Peace be to you.”
 (John 20: 19.)

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace. He was born man at Bethlehem at a time when the nations of the earth were in a state of profound peace. The Angels who announced his birth not only declared Glory to God, but peace to men. The teachings and example of the Incarnate Word in life and in death breathed naught save the purest and most celestial peace; that peace is the highest good, the most substantial blessing we, my brethren, can possess upon earth. The first Christians, as often as they met, wished each other peace: “Peace be to you!” a beautiful custom well worthy the imitation of their degenerate descendants, who greet each other, now-a-days, with empty unmeaning compliments, which are often mere mockeries of true Christian charity. Alas! we scarcely deserve the name of Christians, since we have departed so far from the peace and love of the first followers of Christ. My beloved hearers, let us, to-day, meditate upon the benefits of true peace; for, while man’s life upon earth is a continual warfare, it is, nevertheless, obligatory upon us to seek and preserve:

- I. *Peace with God;*
- II. *Peace with our neighbor; and*
- III. *Peace with ourselves.*

I. *We keep peace with God.*

1. *When we avoid evil.*
2. *When we do good.*

1. Faith teaches us that, through the sin of our first parents, we are all born children of wrath and enemies of God. This enmity is appeased, this wrath averted, when we are born again of water and the Holy Ghost in the Holy Sacrament of Baptism. After our Saviour had completed the work of redemption, he returned to his Father; but, at his departure, he said to his disciples: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.” (John 14: 27.) But in order to retain this divine legacy, it is necessary that we observe its conditions; that we

keep the commandments of God. "Who hath resisted him, and hath had peace?" Let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; "that is, let us will what he commands, and not will what he forbids." Even in human friendships, it is necessary to have congeniality of mind and heart; how is it possible, then, to enjoy the peace and friendship of God if we love what he hates, and cling to that which he abominates.

2. This, however, is not enough! Faith teaches us to avoid evil, but love must incite us *to do good*. Not a dead, but a living faith,—"a faith which worketh by charity," (Gal. 5: 6), must be the agent to effect our peace with God. "The devils also believe and tremble." (James 2: 19.) They do not love—hence they are the enemies of God. We believe in God, as his friends; and divine charity must eternally cement our bonds of friendship with him. "Thou shalt love the Lord with thy whole heart." This is no counsel but a law, a strict command. If we fulfil it, God will give us his peace, "not as the world giveth," (John 14: 27) but a true and lasting peace. The Psalmist declares: "Much peace have they that love thy law," (Ps. 118: 165) and the Apostle of the Gentiles further says: "In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by charity." (Gal. 5: 6.) "If you believe and do not love," says St. Augustine to the Christian soul, "then your faith is no better than that of those who tremble and say: 'We know who thou art, thou art the Son of God.' Love then, for love joined to faith, will lead you to peace."

II. We have peace *with our neighbor*,

1. *When we avoid injuring him; and*
2. *In a greater degree, when we endeavor to serve him.*

1. "If it be possible, as much as is in you, have peace with all men," (Rom. 12: 18) says St. Paul to the Romans: and these words are well worthy the consideration of all Christians. We should keep peace with our neighbor by doing him no harm or damage, by giving him no cause for anger or misunderstanding. We should imitate the conduct of Abraham toward Lot, who, when a question of relative rights arose between them, said: "Let there be no quarrel, I beseech thee, between me and thee, and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen: for we are brethren. Behold the whole land is before thee; depart from me, I pray thee: if thou wilt go to the left hand, I will take the right; if thou choose the right hand, I will pass to the left." (Gen. 13: 8. 9.) O, if we were as free from selfishness, ambition, and avarice as was Abraham, we would never wilfully injure our neighbor in thought, word or deed.

2. On the other hand, we would always endeavor to serve him: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Matth. 19: 19.) We are bound to seek the welfare of our neighbor with a like zeal and diligence to that with which we endeavor to further our own. Let "peace and charity be fulfilled," in you, (Jude 1: 2) says the apostle St. Jude; peace and charity must go hand in hand in your dealings with your neighbor. And this, not merely with those who love you, but with those who injure or offend you. "Keep peace with *all* men," says the Apostle; "we are all brothers in Christ Jesus." A Christian simply fulfills his duty, if he can truly say with the Psalmist: "With them that hated peace, I was peaceable." (Ps. 119: 7.)

III. It is only possible to have peace *with ourselves*,

1. *By living in the state of grace* ; and
2. *By practicing mortification.*

1. Peace of conscience and the certainty of our own blamelessness constitute the happiness of our lives. "A secure mind is like a continual feast." (Prov. 15: 15.) "And the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and mind in Christ Jesus." (Philip. 4: 7.) "There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord." (Isai. 48: 22.) The sinner endures the torment of the infernal regions, even in this world. He must confess, with holy Job: "If I wait, hell is my house." (Job. 17: 13.) St. Bernard also declares a guilty conscience to be the hell and dungeon of the soul ; and St. Jerome confirms this by saying that such a one continually carries his torment with him, being tortured by his own criminal conscience.

2. But, it is not possible to preserve a clean conscience without practising mortification. Even St. Paul confesses : "I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind." (Rom. 7: 23.) "For the good which I will, I do not; but the evil which I will not, that I do." But he explains to us in another passage, how he chastises his body in order to overcome its evil instincts; and we, my brethren, must imitate the great Apostle by bringing our bodies into subjection so "that the body of sin may be destroyed." (Rom. 6:6.) We must renounce a multitude of enticing objects, which awaken unholy desires in our hearts, and quickly lead us into sin: "When concupiscence hath conceived," says St. James, "it bringeth forth sin." (James 1: 15.) It is in this sense that our Saviour proclaims and reconciles an apparent contradiction in his mission. "I came, not to send peace, but the sword." (Matth. 10: 34.) Yet this sword of the spirit, this keen, two-edged mortification of the senses, strange to say, secures to the one who makes use of it peace

of heart and tranquillity of conscience. The *Imitation of Christ* teaches that one attains unto true peace of heart only by resisting the passions, not by yielding to them.

My beloved brethren, I have endeavored to explain to you the true meaning of peace. "Seek after peace, and pursue it." (Ps. 33: 15.) I have shown you the right path to that beautiful kingdom; practise justice and you shall enjoy its delights. Every man desires peace; but all are not willing to practise justice. What does it matter how many difficulties we encounter, if, in the end, we obtain peace? When, by doing good and avoiding evil, we have attained to *peace with God*, when by serving others and refraining from all injury to them, we have established *peace with our neighbors*; and when, lastly, by a pure conscience and daily mortification, we have secured true *peace with ourselves*,—then, we may rest assured that "justice and peace have kissed each other," and that we have the right to be enrolled among those faithful and beloved servants of the Risen Christ to whom he cries out, to-day, in tones of surpassing sweetness and consolation: "Peace be to you!" Amen.

B.

LOW SUNDAY.

THE CAUSE OF DISCORD IN THE WORLD.

“Peace be to you.” (John 20: 19.)

To-day, Jesus Christ appears before us as the Prince of Peace. He comes suddenly into the midst of his disciples, and says to them : “ Peace be to you.” In numerous prophecies, he had been promised to mankind as the Prince of Peace. The world had long lost its highest good—peace—and it sighed and longed for the treasure it had forfeited by sin. No one save the God-given Messiah could restore it. (Is. 9: 6; Is. 53: 5; Luke 1: 39; 2: 14.) All that the world promised itself from its Redeemer, all that it hoped for and expected from him, was expressed in the single phrase : “ *He shall bring peace.*” And he has really brought peace ; for, “ coming, he preached peace to you, who were afar off, and peace to them that were near at hand.” (Ephes. 2: 17, 18). “ Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you ; not as the world giveth do I give to you.” (John 14: 27).

This divine peace which Jesus Christ left in his holy Church, must, therefore, be the blessed portion of all her children, of every Christian, of every citizen of this holy realm of peace. But are we really children of peace ? Is not the world filled with a universal discord which penetrates even to the inmost recesses of our hearts. Our homes are often the abodes of strife. Husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters, masters and servants—all, in turn, destroy the peace of households by their quarrels and dissensions. Why all this civil, social, and domestic discord, my brethren ? What are the causes of this universal dissonance ? They are chiefly three :

- I. *Sin and its consequences ;*
- II. *The inordinate desires of the human heart ; and*
- III. *The unruly passions of men.*

I. What is peace, that heavenly good which the heart of man ardently craves, and without which, he possesses no true happiness ? It seems hard to answer this question briefly and clearly. Human speech is limited, and the ethereal essence of peace is difficult to define in mere

abstract words. Perhaps, peace of heart is enjoyed when all wants are satisfied, all desires gratified, all fears quieted. Peace might be defined as contentment of heart, repose of soul. The peaceful spirit is like a placid lake whose mirror-like surface is never stirred by the smallest ripple.

1. Plainly, such perfect peace of heart and soul can never be found or enjoyed here upon earth. God, alone, bears within himself the fullness of all life and happiness ; and nothing is able to rob him of it or diminish its plenitude. On the other hand, here below, all is defective and incomplete. Only partially, can we hope to possess peace in this world. Beyond the grave, if we are so happy as to be admitted to that realm where God " shall wipe away all tears from the eyes ; and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more," (Apoc. 21: 4)—then, and only then, shall perfect peace be our portion.

2. The measure of our peace in this life depends wholly upon the degree of our union with God, the fountain of all peace. The more closely we are united to him, the fewer obstacles we offer to his grace, the more powerfully and abundantly will peace dwell in us and bless us. Therefore, the very idea of peace teaches us that *sin is the first source of discord*, inasmuch as it separates us from God, the fountain and origin of peace. "There is no peace to the wicked." (Is. 48: 22.) "Who hath resisted him, and hath had peace?" (Job 9: 4.) The wicked are like the raging sea, which cannot rest, and the waves thereof cast up dirt and mire." (Is. 57: 20.) "Much peace have they that love thy law." (Ps. 118: 165.) The just are like the stars which revolve around their sun in order, peace and regularity ; the wicked resemble the wandering meteors which, without a fixed center, sweep the heavens with a wild irregularity, until they fall to the earth, and are dashed to atoms.

3. Does not the experience of the great world as well as our own, show that sin is the first cause of all disorder and discord ? In the beginning, peace prevailed all over the universe. All nature served God in blissful harmony. No breath of discord disturbed its order. In happiness, man walked with God in the garden of joy and delights. The words pain, care and sorrow, were strangers to the human lips, and aliens to the human heart. In peace and happiness, all nature obeyed man, who was appointed by God to be its king. Are not the wonderful order and conformity to law (which although no longer so perfect) still prevail in the world and rejoice our heart—an image and remnant of that universal peace which once filled heaven and earth ?

The eternal peace which forever flows in streams of everlasting bliss from the Blessed Trinity, had its reflection, here below, in the visible realm of creation up to the hour that sin entered the world. Alas! then was produced a dire confusion in the primal order, destroying the holy peace of God which had formerly prevailed. Man through his disobedience, lost his centre in God; he was given over to the passions of his heart, and even introduced discord into visible nature whose king he should be. Irrational creatures, since Adam's fall, attack, and make war one upon another; wherefore, St. Paul says: "The expectation of the creature waiteth for the revelation of the sons of God;" and, "Every creature groaneth, and is in labor even till now," (Rom. 8: 19-22) in their yearning after the peace of God.

Does not our own experience tell us that with sin, discord arises in our interior? So long as the heart of a man is innocent and knows not sin, peace and happiness dwell therein. But as soon as sin enters the soul, peace and joy are at an end.

4. How could it be otherwise? The sinner is pursued by the reproaches of his conscience. The evil which he has committed begets that gnawing worm which never dies, and which unceasingly torments him. He is stricken from the number of the friends of God, and his name is blotted out from the book of life. He is a reprobate before heaven and the divine chastisements are ready to fall upon him. "Who has resisted him, and hath had peace." The Book of Wisdom graphically describes the condition of a sinful soul pursued and tormented by the just vengeance of God. It shows how the Lord might, if he so willed, pursue and punish the sinner with bears and lions and newly-created and ravenous beasts. "Yea, and without these, they might have been slain with one blast, persecuted by their own deeds." (Wisd. 11: 21.) Like a devastating storm, remorse of conscience rages in the soul of the sinner. He sinks down into doubt and ignorance. Truth as well as innocence flies from his interior, and untruth and unbelief cast their dark shadows over him. He trembles at every step. Consternation and despair seize him at the bare thought of death. One sin drives him to another. His soul resembles in its condition that of the world before the advent of "its Redeemer, when the night of paganism with all its nameless misery lay upon it."

5. Christ is the Prince of Peace. In him alone, is to be found true peace of heart. By his grace, he has annihilated the destructive consequences of sin, and has reunited us to God, the source of our peace. He has become our peace, because by his holy teachings he has removed from us the night of darkness and ignorance, and has made the sun of truth to shine upon, and enlighten us. He has

become our peace, because by his grace, and particularly by his holy Sacraments, he grants us the pardon of our sins, and frees us from the anguish and the reproaches of conscience, together with the wrath and chastisements of God. The streams of peace flow forth from him and from his holy Church, which is for us, indeed, the golden city of peace.

II. Sin is the deep source, the only true cause, of discord, but apart from sins of action, there are the inordinate lusts and desires of the human heart, which rob man of the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. Our corrupt nature is an abyss of desires. Every apparent good awakens in the heart of man a keen desire, a burning thirst, to possess it. The desires of a soul in the grace of God, are all kept in check by the firm and powerful curb of the divine will: and are, therefore, unable to disturb its interior peace. But, as soon as the soul has cast off the yoke of Christ by wilful sin, its unchecked desires precipitate it into an abyss of confusion, and all kinds of disorder. As soon as man consents to sin, the most violent war rages in the soul. Opposing forces rush against each other, and the heart of the sinner is like a battle-field, trampled and torn up by the fury of combat. How could peace dwell in such an interior? "The wicked are like the raging sea, which cannot rest, and the waves thereof cast up dirt and mire." (Is. 57: 20.) The desires and passions of the sinner, like the mighty waves of a tempestuous sea, rise against each other in fierce battle; and fresh impurities and filthy imaginations are constantly cast up from the black depths of the heart.

2. Let us consider in detail these sinful desires of the heart, in order to understand how they rob us of peace. Man being composed of body and soul finds himself swayed alternately by opposing desires and inclinations: those of the spirit which draw us up to heaven, and those of the flesh which draw us down to hell. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the spirit against the flesh." (Gal. 5: 17.) So long as the flesh is under the dominion of the spirit, and the low desires of sensuality are subject to the higher law of God, man will possess peace; but with sin, disorder and strife enter into the soul. The inmost being of man is torn asunder; and discord, torment, and unrest overpower him. The more noble a man's heart, the more he seeks with all his might to serve God, so much the more will this continual warfare in his interior pain and oppress him. He will sigh and struggle for the peace of his soul. He will exclaim with St. Paul: "I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating

me in the law of sin, that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am : who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?" (Rom. 7: 23, 24.)

3. Behold, what discord and vehement emotion, a violent passion creates ! Penetrate into the soul of *the proud man*, and remark the strange conflicts which toss it to and fro, the racking tortures where-with it is tormented ! He views with dissatisfaction, envy, and suspicion the gifts and goods of his neighbor. Tormented by a continual jealousy, he sees in every man, a rival and an enemy. He is unhappy if his passion is not flattered and gratified. No honor or distinction is high or great enough for him. He is always urged on anew by fresh desires, like that ancient king of whom we read that, having conquered and subjugated all the known nations of the earth, he wept, in the pride of his heart, upon hearing that men dwelt in the stars, over whom he could not rule.

4. Scarcely less are the torments caused by *avarice* in its victims. The greed for earthly goods, gnaws unceasingly at the heart of man, and gives him no peace either by day or night. Sadness seizes him, when his business projects are unsuccessful, or his miserly desires ungratified. Despair and anguish overcome him when he is threatened by a loss. The covetous king, Achab, "cast himself upon his bed, turned away his face to the wall and would not eat bread," (3 Kings 21: 4), because he could not possess himself of the vineyard of his neighbor.

5. Like storms disturb the soul of *the revengeful man* and *the voluptuary* ; for every sinful desire has trouble for its partner. What wonder, then, that peace is so often wanting to us ! Look into your own hearts, my brethren, and you will acknowledge that every time discord reigns therein, it is because of the fury of some evil passion or sinful desire.

- The less our passions have power over us, the more our sinful desires are kept in subjection.

III. If once the mighty billows of evil and sin have arisen within us, they will not be content to rage within our own hearts, but will destructively invade the great life of the world, throwing it in its turn into confusion and disorder. When a soul has stepped out of its right relations to its God, it will carry the evil consequences of its sin to all about it, spreading discontent and disorder on every side. For this reason, the life of the world, in its passions and strifes, is the third source of discord for our souls.

1. The world ever hinders and opposes the best efforts and intentions of our hearts. It breeds discontent, if possible, with our state of life, our vocation, our external relations with one another. But, it is more

particularly the passions of the men who surround us which disturb the great life of the world, and react, in turn, upon our own peace of mind and heart. The root of sin, it is true, is buried in our own hearts, but as it grows, it spreads forth its mighty branches, sending out its poisonous blossoms and deadly fruit in every direction. "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies." (Matt. 15 : 19.)

2. Detractions and calumnies, lies and all evil speeches are begotten of the evil passions of men, and are the keen-edged weapons wherewith they persecute one another. The hatred of our neighbor is the fruitful mother of innumerable sins against charity. When nation rises against nation in bloody battle, when the torch of war enkindles the land, and unspeakable woe is spread abroad, may not all the anguish and destruction be traced to the disputes of powerful rulers? Streams of human blood have drenched the earth again and again, shed in unjust warfare. Was there ever a just war in its first cause? Was it not always passion which sowed the first seeds of discord? Was it not passion that fired the brand and fanned the flame until it grew into a world-consuming fire? The passions of the human heart have separated families, placed nations and states in opposition to one another, and desolated whole countries.

3. What has always caused the conflict between truth and falsehood, between the kingdom of darkness and that of light? The passions of men and their unholy desires, which violently oppose the truth and seek to destroy it. Human passions originated all the heresies and schisms that have ever desolated Christendom; and enkindled all the persecutions of the Church during the eighteen centuries of her existence, just as the passions of the Jews condemned the Redeemer, and nailed him to the cross. The unruly passions of men, in our days, have aroused the violent war of infidelity against the Church of the living God; and, like devouring monsters, would fain have destroyed the life of the whole world with their poisonous breath. Nothing is sacred to them, and nothing earthly is mighty enough to place a barrier to their power. They utterly subvert the peace of the human soul, handing it over to a tormenting unrest; and, undermining the whole social order, like a destructive torrent, carry devastation and death everywhere in their track.

4. Here, again, Christ appears as the Prince of Peace. By word and example, he calls upon us to live in peace with all men; rather to suffer injury than inflict injury: never to repay evil with evil.

“ Love your enemies ; do good to them that hate you ; pray for them that persecute and calumniate you ; that you may be the children of your Father, who is in heaven.” (Matt. 5 : 44.) Gentleness, meekness, humility, and love were the sole answers of the Lord to all the insults of his enemies. He expired praying for his murderers. We must imbibe this spirit of peace ; and then, no earthly passion will be able to disturb the repose of our souls. It will teach us to conquer evil, to correct every weakness and failing of our lives ; to bear with patience the frailties of others, and to forgive injuries and offenses.

5. It is undoubtedly true that Christian peace is incompatible with sin. Yet it does not require that we should pervert right into wrong, good into evil, or consider the sinful and ungodly spirit of the world good and holy. Neither does it require of us that we should allow ourselves to be robbed of our rights without contradiction or opposition ; but, if it contends for them, it contends for them (as its name implies), without passion or hatred against the offender. The Christian may seize the sword in order to attack evil and wickedness, and defend principles of truth and justice, but he is always full of love for the erring, and ever ready to be reconciled with his enemies. He even beholds in his greatest enemy simply an erring brother whom he seeks to win back to the right by love and gentleness. The Angel of peace ever requires a sacrifice ; but divine charity will inspire and animate us willingly and gladly to make those sacrifices by which peace and reconciliation may be effected. Jesus Christ, by his death upon the cross, has become our peace, and his grand sacrifice must oblige us to imitate his spirit, to anticipate our enemy and adversary, and endeavor to outdo him in kindness. Hence, our Saviour says of this spirit of peace which should govern us, “ To him that striketh thee on the one cheek, offer also the other. And him that taketh away from thee thy cloak, hinder not to take thy coat also.” (Luke 6 : 29.)

The fountain of perpetual peace for us flows only in Christ and his holy Church. Neither civil nor martial law can establish and preserve it upon earth, if the spirit of Jesus Christ be not living in, and controlling, the hearts of men. Let us banish sin from our souls ; let us habitually and firmly restrain the violence of our passions, and the peace of Jesus Christ will not only possess our individual souls, but, like the waves of the ocean, will inundate the world. Diffusing therein a peace which will solve all the problems of the ages, it will lead us, at last, if faithful to the will and inspirations of our Master, the Prince of Peace, to the enjoyment of the eternal peace of heaven. Amen.

BISHOP EHRLER.

FIRST COMMUNION.

THE RENEWAL OF THE BAPTISMAL VOWS.

“In that day, there shall be a fountain open to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Israel : for the washing of the sinner.”
(Zach. 13 : 1.)

Agar, the bond-woman of Abraham, being cast out from his home at the request of Sarah, departed with her son Ismael, and wandered disconsolately in the desert of Bersabee. On her shoulder, she carried bread and a bottle of water. But when the bread was consumed and the water in the bottle was spent, and the boy was famishing : she cast him down under one of the trees, and went her way ; she sat over against him a great way off, as far as a bow can carry, saying : “ I will not see the boy die : and sitting over against she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy : and an angel of God called to Agar from heaven, saying : What art thou doing Agar ? fear not, for God hath heard the voice of the boy from the place wherein he is. Arise, take the boy, and hold him by the hand. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water, and went and filled the bottle, and gave the boy to drink.”

I. Why do I relate to-day this affecting narrative from the Holy Scripture ? I doubt not but that you all know what I mean by it. At your birth, you entered into a wilderness—the wilderness of this life ; and long ago, you would have perished therein, if God’s goodness had not cared for and preserved you up to this day ; for all the vigilant attention and assistance of your parents were no more than the bread and the bottle of water which Agar carried on her shoulder. But if your body and temporal life urgently needed the divine care and protection, much more did your soul require them ; for, from the first moment of its existence, it was defiled with the guilt of original sin, an object of displeasure to Almighty God, and unfit to be admitted into his heavenly kingdom. How great was your misery while you were in that state, and how much greater would it have been had you died in it ! But the good and merciful God could not see you perish, and though you knew not how to cry to him for help, the angel of the Lord showed your parents a fountain of water far more efficacious and life-giving than that which furnished Agar with drink for her famishing son. It is that fountain

which the prophet Zachary beheld in vision, as the fountain of grace and salvation, and whereof he says: "In that day, there shall be a fountain open to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for the washing of the sinner."

1. "This well-spring of grace and salvation is the Baptismal font: and as Agar hastened with her child to the waters which would preserve his life, so Christian parents delay not to bring their offspring, as soon as possible, to the saving waters of Baptism. Washed and cleansed therein, the child receives such grace and strength as to enable it to wander through the long, dreary wilderness of this life. Oh! what power and grace has the ordinance of God placed in that common and simple element,—water! Christ himself praises Baptism, by calling it the bath of regeneration and the door by which we enter into heaven; for to Nicodemus he said: "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he can not enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3: 5.) And St. Paul says to those who are baptised: "You are washed, you are sanctified, you are justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 6: 11.) But whence does the Baptismal water derive this wonderful power of cleansing the soul from the deep stain of sin? From the merits of Christ, from that sacred blood which he shed on Mount Calvary for the redemption of the world. The blood of Christ frees us from all sins. He, the Holy One, died for sinners; he, the Just One, for the unjust; and we are cleansed in Baptism through the Spirit of God, whose purifying and sanctifying grace Christ merited for us by his work of redemption. In Baptism, therefore, you have been freed from sin and sanctified; you have been made children of God and members of the Church of Christ, and have received a right to the inheritance of heaven,—on condition that you make a good use of the means of grace and salvation, which the Holy Ghost administers in the Church.

You are reminded of these graces and promises by the baptismal font, which is, therefore, a *memorial* of the love and goodness of God, as well as the Christian's monitor of the duties and obligations which he assumed at the moment of his Baptism. When you received that saving Sacrament, your sponsors promised in your name that you would make good use of the means of grace and salvation, and lead a holy Christian life.

2. You are assembled here to-day, my dear little children, my beloved first-communicants, in order to renew that promise, and to repeat before God and the whole congregation, your solemn vow to belong entirely to your divine Master, to, henceforth, serve him alone and renounce every thing that is displeasing to him. The significance

and obligations of your baptismal vows, your sacred duties as Christians and devout Catholics, have been explained to you at great length in the catechetical instructions to which you have listened for the last six years. But I ask you, dear children, as well as all here present,—have you hitherto kept the promise made at your Baptism? Conscientiously examine your consciences on this point, and answer this question in your interior.

3. At your Baptism, *you renounced the devil with all his works and pomps.* Now tell me, have you always fought courageously against the temptations of Satan, refused to listen to his suggestions, and shunned the company of his adherents? By the works of the devil, we understand sin. Every thought, every desire, every word and action contrary to the law and will of God, are the works of the devil. Have you, then, as far as in you lay, avoided the works of the devil? that is, pride, covetousness, lust, anger, envy, gluttony, lies, slander, and detraction? At your Baptism, you promised an undoubting faith in God, the Father, God, the Son, and God, the Holy Ghost,—a belief in all that God has revealed, and the Catholic Church proposes to be believed: Have you always firmly adhered to your faith, doubting nothing that it teaches, and have you defended it when you heard it attacked by scoffers? Have you never been ashamed to declare your faith openly? Have you endeavored to profess and glorify it by a life which accorded with its regulations; by a faithful observance of the divine commandments and ecclesiastical precepts; by obedience to your parents, by the love and fear of God, and the worthy reception of the Sacraments? Have you endeavored to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ? to imitate his fervor in prayer, his humility and meekness, his chastity and purity of heart, his patience and justice? Answer to yourselves all these questions, and if you must acknowledge that in one or the other of these points you have failed and been unfaithful to your promises, make the resolution, from this day forward, to keep more faithfully *the baptismal vows* which you are now about to renew.

RENEWAL OF THE BAPTISMAL VOWS.

II. Shortly before his death, Josue, together with the children of Israel, renewed the covenant made by God with his fathers; and he then said to the people: “*You are witnesses that you yourselves have chosen you the Lord to serve him,* and they answered: *We are witnesses. We will serve the Lord our God, and we will be obedient to his commandments.*” And Josue took a great stone, and set it under the ark that was in the sanctuary of the Lord; and he said to all the people: Behold, this stone shall be a testimony unto you, that it hath heard all the words of the Lord which he hath spoken to you; lest, perhaps,

hereafter you will deny it, and lie to the Lord." (Josue 24:22 seq.) My dear children, you have just now done what Josue and the people of Israel did in the days of old ; you have renewed your baptismal vows, you have solemnly declared that *you yourselves have chosen the Lord to serve him, and to be obedient to his commandments* ; and this baptismal font, which has already been the silent witness of the promises your sponsors made eleven or twelve years ago in your name,—now stands forth, as it were, a pledge of your own ratification of those solemn baptismal vows.

1. This baptismal font shall be *indeed a testimony unto you*. It stands in this sanctuary of the Lord as a continual reminder of the promises you have made ; and as often as you behold it, it recalls your sworn obligations to serve the Lord and to be obedient to his commandments, to live and die in practice of the holy Roman Catholic faith. Let it not bear witness, I implore you, that you have broken your solemn vows and lied to the Lord your God ; let it not, through your own fault, accuse you before the judgment seat of God, and demand vengeance against you : "For know, if you break this covenant, if you leave the Lord, if you break your promises, if you turn your backs upon the Lord and serve strange gods, *he will turn, and will afflict you*, and will destroy you after all the good he has done you." (Jos. 24: 20.)

2. Ah ! yes, *this baptismal font is set for the ruin or for the resurrection of all who have been cleansed in its waters*. It is a memorial of the love of God for us, and an earnest monitor of our duties to God. It reminds you, that here you were freed from original sin ; and from being children of wrath, were re-born children of God, and received into the Church of Jesus Christ ; it recalls to your mind the heavenly inheritance to which it presented you the first title. And if it should unfortunately bear testimony against you at the Last Day, the Judge will then say to the faithless Christian : "Out of thy own mouth I judge thee, thou wicked servant." (Luke 19:22.) "By reason of thy own promises, which thou hast solemnly made to me, but shamefully broken, I condemn thee!" Then will he say to all the unhappy violators of their baptismal vows : "Depart from me whom you have not loved, from me, to whose commandments, in spite of all your promises, you have not been obedient ; depart from me and go to be the slaves of Satan, whom you, indeed, once renounced, but whose works you, nevertheless, performed. Depart from me into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matt. 25:41.)

O my dear Christians, may this Baptismal font not be *your accuser before the judgment-seat of Christ* ! Do not pass it by thoughtlessly and indifferently ; ask yourselves whenever you gaze upon it in the

church : "What have I promised here to God? How have I kept my promise? What was promised me here by God, in return? Will I obtain it? Here I received the name of a Christian—do I lead a life worthy of a Christian? Here I was received into the Church militant, will I one day enter into the Church triumphant? These and similar questions ask yourselves whenever you look upon the baptismal font, and pay attention to the answer which your conscience gives you.

Correct your errors, amend your life; repair by greater fervor the negligence of the past, and remain faithful for the future to your baptismal vows and promises, that God, "who hath begun the good work in you" at this holy font, may "perfect it unto the day of Christ." (Phil. 1:6.) God grant that the names of all that were here baptized may be written in fadeless characters in the book of everlasting life ! Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE DUTIES OF PARENTS.

“I am the Good Shepherd.” (John 10:1.)

The Pharisees continually and blasphemously assailed our Saviour's teachings on the ground that he had no authority to institute a new doctrine. They held fast to the law of Moses; and, although the divine Law-giver himself, (who confirmed his teachings by miracles rather than by words), was present among them, they cast him forth from the synagogue as a violator of the law. In the present Gospel, our Saviour deigned to explain clearly to them the source of his high vocation. Since those presumptuous men constantly endeavored to turn against him the words of the inspired Writers, he proves to them from the sacred Scripture that he is really the Good Shepherd of whom God predicted by the voice of the prophet: “I will set up one shepherd over them; and he shall feed them.” (Ezech. 34:23.) As clear as the noon-day sun he reveals to them, in his own person, all the qualifications of a Good Shepherd. The office of a good shepherd is one of trust, of tenderness, of devotion, and self-sacrifice—yea, even unto death. “The Good Shepherd giveth his life for his sheep.” Such an office is analogous to that of a parent; and hence, on this occasion, I shall explain to you that every head of a household, as a good shepherd, must feed his family,

- I. *By his prayers;*
- II. *By his admonitions; and*
- III. *By his example.*

Our Saviour after his resurrection repeated three times to St. Peter, “Feed my sheep,” as though to say: Feed them with spiritual food—with words and with works. This charge which was given to St. Peter as the chief shepherd of souls, our Lord repeats to all who are in authority, either spiritually or temporally.

I. No matter how vigilant or careful the head of the house may be, it will avail little without the blessing of God. “Unless the Lord

build the house, they labor in vain that build it." (Ps. 126:1.) His family and servants may be as faithful to him as possible, and yet they may not be able to protect his property. "Unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it." (Ps. 126:21.) What, then, is the parent's surest safeguard and defense? *Prayer.* "Ask and you shall receive." Hence, the Apostle admonishes us, before all things, to pray. In order to show that this command is addressed chiefly to fathers and mothers, he adds: "I will, therefore, that men pray in every place, lifting up pure hands, without anger and strife. In like manner women." (1 Tim. 2:8.) As all are bound to seek first the kingdom of God, so, also, the head of the family is obliged to pray first for the spiritual, and afterwards for the temporal welfare of his household. Job, who "was simple, and upright, and fearing God and avoiding evil, rose up early and offered holocausts for every one of his sons. And why? Lest perhaps they might have sinned. "So did Job all days." (Job 1:1-5.) Would that all fathers imitated Job in this practice of daily and most fervent prayer! The fold of every Catholic home would then possess a good shepherd and every Catholic child a good Christian father.

II. In the Lord's Prayer we say: "Give us this day our daily bread." From our youth up we have been taught that this petition refers not only to the material food of the body, but, much more, to the interior food of the soul. In like manner the father of a family is bound to provide for the spiritual even more than for the temporal nourishment of his dependents. To him the divine command to Israel is applicable. "Set your heart on all the words I testify to you this day; which you shall command your children to observe and to do, and to fulfil all that is written in this law: for they are not commanded you in vain, but that every one should live in them." (Deut. 32:46.) And: "Bring up your children in the discipline and correction of the Lord" (Ephes. 6:4), that is, instruct them by precepts, and if these do not secure obedience, administer corporal punishment, for it is written, "Withhold not correction from a child, for if thou strike him with the rod he shall not die." (Prov. 23:13.) A good father requires not only his children, but also every other inmate of his house to live in discipline; on which account St. Paul says: "Servants, obey your carnal masters, with fear and trembling, in the simplicity of your heart, as Christ." (Ephes. 6:5.) Alas! how many heads of families are more concerned about their cattle than they are about the salvation of their servants and dependents! How many are more careful of their swine than of their sons! Truly these are not good shepherds!

III. But prayers and admonitions will be of little account if the master or mistress does not set a *good example* to the family. In every case example is far more powerful than words. Woe to you, fathers, woe to you, mothers, if your example tends rather to scandalize than edify those under your care ! Hirelings you are then, who live as if the sheep were none of your concern ; and who, instead of driving off the infernal wolf, become yourselves wolves, which prey upon and destroy the unhappy sheep and lambs. Remember that “a most severe judgment shall be for them that bear rule.” (Wis. 6 :6.) The misguided and scandalized souls which God intrusted to your parental care will be required at your hands on the awful day of reckoning. Even in this world you and your children will suffer punishment, because you have offended him who says : “I am the Lord thy God, mighty, jealous, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, into the third and fourth generations of them that hate me.” (Exod. 10 :5.) “God shall lay up the sorrow of the father for his children,” says holy Job, “and when he shall repay, then shall he (the father) know. His eyes shall see his own destruction, and he shall drink of the wrath of the Almighty.” (Job 21 :29.)

Christian parents, do not these considerations move you ? Have you all along faithfully performed the duties of good shepherds ? Are you hirelings, or, perhaps, devouring wolves ? Listen ! Our Saviour, as the Good Shepherd, says : “I am come that they may have life and may have it more abundantly.” (John 10 :10.) Imitate his glorious example ; be solicitous for the supernatural life of your flock ; feed them daily and zealously by your fervent prayers, by your admirable instructions, by your pious and edifying example, so that they may have life, superabundant life. Fixing your eyes ever upon your divine model, Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, beg him to aid you in guiding your little flock through all the dangers of body and soul which beset them in this thorny wilderness, called Life ; and when difficulties and trials environ your households, and you seem to behold the hard, unbroken wall of adverse circumstances closing in and around you and your children, hearken to the sweet, consoling voice of the Good Shepherd calling to you : “I am the door. If any one enter by me, he shall be saved ; and he shall go in and go out, and shall find pasture”—yea, even the beautiful and fadeless pastures of eternal life.—Amen.

B.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE IMITATION OF CHRIST.

“I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also.”
(John 13: 15).

The life and death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, crowned by the feast of Easter, stand as a complete fact before us. He was born, lived, taught and worked, and finally suffered and died for us ; he rose again from the dead, and, after a few days, we shall celebrate his glorious Ascension into heaven. At this season, the Church calls upon us to look up to Jesus, and behold in him our perfect model and ideal. And as the completed life of our dear Lord shines out before our eyes, it should inspire us with courage to imitate him. In this sense, are the words of this day's gospel to be understood. Our Saviour is represented as the Good Shepherd who goes before his flock ; and we, as faithful sheep, are admonished to follow in his steps.

About five hundred years ago a very spiritual man wrote a book on the following of Christ, describing in four divisions the interior and exterior life of the Christian who truly imitates his divine Lord and Master. Second only to the Gospels, no other book has ever had as many editions, or been read by as many people as the *Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis. It is translated into every language of the universe ; and millions upon millions have drawn lessons of wisdom from its pages ; proof enough that the memory of Christ can not be obliterated from the heart of man, and also a proof that his life will at all times be regarded as the model and ideal of a Christian's life. Man needs a model and exemplar in his journey to eternity. Cold teaching, lifeless precepts and commands can never lead him to perfection in anything ; he must be encouraged by a living reality, by a living, breathing embodiment of dead precepts and commands, he must realize the end of all his labors as a living fact. Such was the practical teaching of Christ, saying : “I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so do you also.” “He that taketh not up his cross, and followeth me, is not worthy of me.” (Matt. 10: 38.)

The life of our Saviour stands before us in two great periods :

- I. His *hidden* life at Nazareth ; and
- II. His *public* life throughout all Judea.

From his hidden life we learn his principles, which we must adopt as our own ; and from his public life, his virtues, which we must practise in order to obtain life everlasting.

I. The greater part of Christ's life upon earth was a hidden life. For thirty years he lived in perfect retirement from the world, in his quiet home at Nazareth. With the exception of his visit to Jerusalem at the age of twelve years, the Sacred Scripture tells us nothing, except "that he went with them (Mary and Joseph), and came back to Nazareth and was subject to them. And Jesus increased in wisdom, and age, and grace with God and man." (Luke 2 : 51, 52.)

We generally regard this important phase of our Lord's life as possessing interest alone for young people and children. But this is a great mistake. Every moment of Christ's life is replete with profound truth and wisdom for the instruction and imitation of all Christians ; with sound principles and maxims which must govern us during our whole life. Sound principles are of the greatest importance ; they are, as it were, a celestial life-blood coursing through the veins of the soul, affecting both our interior and exterior existence ; and revealing to those about us the wholesome condition of our spiritual life. These fundamental principles our Saviour has taught us in his hidden life at Nazareth, and he seems to have spent all those years in seclusion, in order to place before us their importance. Above all, three sublime heavenly virtues shine forth like stars from his hidden and public life.

1. *His perfect contempt of all temporal goods and pleasures ;*
2. *His ineffable humility ; and*
3. *His incomprehensible obedience to the will of his heavenly Father.*

1. First of all, a sovereign contempt of the world, an indifference to the painted toys, the delusive charms, the perishable goods of life, must fill the soul of every true, practical Catholic. He has promised time and again to raise his eyes from the fleeting goods of earth, to the imperishable delights of Paradise, and to strive to secure the latter at any cost. He must be ready to part with all temporal goods, and to renounce all worldly pleasures if they can not be possessed and enjoyed without sin. If he has his treasure in heaven, his affections must also be there, for the Lord has said : "Where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also." (Matt. 6 : 21.) Truly, I can not find more beautiful words to describe to you the Christian life, in its depth and truth, than these words of St. John : "Love not the world, nor those things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him. And the world passeth away, and the concupiscence thereof. But he that doeth the will of God, abideth forever." (1 John

2 : 15-17.) And St. James says : " Religion pure and unspotted with God and the Father is this : To visit the fatherless and widows in their tribulation, and to keep one's self undefiled from this world." (James 1 : 27.) How can we pretend to be Christians, if our hearts are filled with the love and desire of temporal goods and pleasures ? Beasts are made for the earth, and they find there their happiness. Hence, as they walk, they look down always upon the earth ; but man is not made for the earth—he stands erect, his eyes are turned toward heaven. Pagans and unbelievers do not look beyond this world for the end and object of their lives ; and they regard its goods and pleasures as their final destiny. The heathens, as St. Paul truly says, have no hope ; but our expectation is the revelation of the children of God, and his holy kingdom is the world to come, and our conversation is in heaven.

2. Humility of heart is another distinguishing mark of a true and pious Christian. Recognizing his total dependence on God, conscious of his own weakness, frailty, and unworthiness, he walks before God in humility and fear, expecting from him help and strength in every condition of life.

3. With humility and contempt of earthly things are closely united in the soul of the practical Catholic, *obedience* to God and his commandments, to the Church, her ministers, and to the civil authorities—acknowledging as he does, that obedience and submission to "the powers that be" are necessary for the due maintenance of order in the world.

The unchristian spirit of our times manifests itself in the absence of these principles and virtues. A new Paganism casts its dark shadows over Christian society. The desires and hopes of mankind are centred in worldly goods and pleasures. The concupiscence of the eye, the concupiscence of the flesh, and the pride of life form the trinity of heathenism as opposed to the trinity of virtues which should animate us as Christians. Uncharitableness and injustice,—contempt and hatred of the neighbor,—theft, robbery, and bloodshed spring from these unbridled and unhallowed desires of earthly goods. Whence arises the unbounded forgetfulness of God, so prevalent in our days ; whence the deplorable contempt of religion and its graces, the rebellious opposition to Jesus Christ and his holy Church, if not from the pride which dwells and rules in the hearts of men. The universal spirit of discontent and selfishness, the increasing luxury and gross sensuality upon one side, and the fearful poverty and abject want on the other, have no other source or last cause than the overweening pride which devastates the world. Dives is ever overlooking or crushing the helpless Lazarus in his path ; in his pride and prosperity, he forgets that he

also is a weak, frail and sinful creature, he forgets that he needs the grace of God and the succor of his holy Church, he despises prayer and the means of salvation, and in his haughty arrogance, he looks upon his less fortunate neighbor with contempt. Abandoned by God and his grace to his reprobate sense, what can become of him, but to sink into the most abominable sins and vices.

And that disobedience which works untold ruin in our civil society, undermines and destroys the family life as well. Lost in schemes of imaginary liberty man neglects or violates the holiest of ties, and regards his own will and caprice as his highest and most binding law. Only brute force can compel him to submit to lawful authority.

If we examine into the misery of our times, into our own and others' sins, we shall soon trace their cause to lamentable absence of Christian principles and virtues. Nothing can mend the times or apply a remedy to the wound of our own hearts, save the restoration of those old-fashioned principles which bear within themselves the germ of true spiritual life.

The hidden life of our Lord furnishes us, as we have said, with a bright example of these virtues and principles. For thirty long years he practised them, in order that he might imprint them deeply on our hearts.

a. He divested himself of all love and attachment to the world, and to its goods and pleasures. Poverty and privation, want and sorrow, did he choose for his constant companions during his life upon earth. Poor were the parents whom he selected. The royal house of David must lose all external power and splendor and sink into insignificance in the eyes of men, before the Incarnate Word should consent to appear before the world as one of its descendants. Poor was his dwelling, poor his way of living. "*The foxes have their holes, and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.*" (Matt. 8 : 20.) He chose poverty for his bride, and loved it to the end of his life. Behold, how his love of poverty condemns our unchristian desire for the riches and pleasures of the world !

b. *Learn of me because I am meek and humble of heart ; and you shall find rest to your souls.*" (Matt. 11 ; 29.) In his hidden life, Christ presents to us an example of the greatest humility. So humbly and obscurely did he live in the house of his parents at Nazareth, that we might almost question his heavenly dignity. In the humble form of man he dwelt amongst us, and humbly submitted to the authority of man.

c. Moreover, how great was the obedience which our Saviour practised during his hidden life. This virtue—his obedience to his parents—is especially recorded and praised in Holy Writ, " And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth ; and was subject to them." (Luke

2 : 51.) Obedient to the will of his Father in heaven he submits himself to the legal rites of Judaism, the circumcision and the presentation in the temple. With the same obedience, he went up to Jerusalem in his twelfth year. "He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. 2 : 8).

If, therefore, we desire to imitate Christ, we must practise these three great virtues which are exemplified in his hidden life. Our hearts must become Christ-like. Love of the world, pride, and disobedience, must be discarded ; and contempt of the world, humility and obedience must become living and active in us. I say to you : "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." (Gal. 5 : 16, 25.)

II. After our Saviour had spent the first thirty years of his life in the quiet retreat at Nazareth, before he began his public life, he retired into the desert for forty days and nights in order to prepare himself by prayer and fasting for his sublime mission. Thereafter, he went forth to the river Jordan to receive the final consecration of his holy office—the baptism of St. John. He then began to journey through Judea, as the Teacher of Mankind. For three years he went about, followed by the disciples who flocked to him, preaching his sublime doctrine, and working many signs and wonders, in order to convince the people that he was the Messias sent by God. Thus he continued to act until the moment arrived in which it was decreed that he should go up to Jerusalem to fulfil all that the Prophets had written concerning the Son of Man.

1. Our Saviour retires into the desert to prepare himself for his great mission by prayer and fasting, to teach us that we should not thoughtlessly and without serious reflection and acts of self-denial, embrace any earthly calling ; that we should not, against the will of God, enter a vocation which we do not love, and for whose exercise we do not possess the requisite qualifications. We must not make choice of a state of life without endeavoring to ascertain the will of God in our regard. We must not leave so important a decision to chance, or the advice of worldly relatives and friends. It is a serious thing for young people to decide their own vocations, to make choice of that which is best and most suitable for them among the myriad ways of life. Heaven protect you, my dear friends, from a rash and hasty beginning ; for you prepare for yourselves and all belonging to you a sad career of sorrow and torment. Before you enter upon the duties of your future life, go into spiritual retreat with your Saviour, and beg of him to enlighten you as to the right road in which his divine providence wills you to walk. As Jesus began his public life

with prayer and fasting, so the pious Christian enters upon his earthly vocation in a serious and penitential spirit. He who seeks only the agreeable in life, and wishes to walk in flowery, thornless paths, will be painfully undeceived in the end. Every earthly calling is a probation for eternal life ; and the Christian knows that in every condition of life, the fire of temptation must try him that he may be fitted for Heaven.

2. How admirable was our Lord's fidelity to his vocation ! He had no other aim or object than to do the will of his Father, to re-establish the honor of God upon earth and to redeem mankind. " I have food to eat, which you know not of. My food is to do the will of him that sent me, that I may perfect his work." (John 4: 32-34.) Zeal for the glory of God consumed him. He who meekly and patiently endured the greatest insults of his enemies, was seized with indignation when he saw the house of his Father profaned and desecrated, even going so far as to drive the offenders with a scourge from the Temple.

3. How great was his love and mercy to all ! " He went about doing good." (Acts 10: 38.) He restored sight to the blind ; he gave hearing to the deaf ; he healed the sick ; and gave to the lame and paralyzed, free use of their limbs. He dried every tear, and alleviated every sorrow. Who ever went away from him without help and comfort ? He represented his mercy to sinful men under the most beautiful images, presenting himself to our contemplation under the form of the Good Shepherd ; of the forgiving father of the Prodigal Son ; and of the Good Samaritan, who devoted himself to the care and cure of the wounded man he found upon the road. He was full of incomprehensible love for his bitterest and most inveterate enemies ; his divine heart was full of love and pity for his betrayer, and begged forgiveness for those merciless wretches who nailed him to the cross !

4. But how can I speak of the imitation of Jesus Christ without referring to his bitter Passion ? Are not the eyes of the whole Christian world directed to Jesus upon the cross ? His holy cross is not merely his death-bed ; it is the pulpit from which he constantly announces to us the most impressive lessons and admonitions. In the cross, we behold the significance of sufferings ; and the manner in which we should endure our own sorrows and afflictions. It discloses to us a glimpse of that glory which shall be our reward, if we endure patiently unto the end.

As the life of Christ was filled with trials and tribulations, so, also, the life of a Christian is sown with sorrows and afflictions. Heavy and oppressive is the yoke of misery which is borne by all the children

of Adam ; for every one has his peculiar cross. Do not our sufferings often fill us with impatience and discontent? Murmuring and complaining, we rebel against the hand of God, when it presses too heavily upon us. "Why must I continually bear this heavy cross?" we exclaim ; and we are consumed with grief and envy when we behold another apparently more happy than ourselves. But the cross of Jesus Christ provides a remedy for all this. It points out to us the sins of the world for which our Saviour atoned on Calvary ; and it teaches us that in sin, alone, lies the well-spring of all the woes and miseries of earth. "He who has sinned must do penance," cries out every wound of our sweet Jesus bleeding and dying for us on the cross. Shall we hesitate to endure the penalties of our own sins, when he, the All-Holy One, suffers the bitterest woes for the sins of others? The cross of Christ tells that sorrow is the bitter, but necessary medicine of life, which heals our souls of all their diseases, cleanses them of all defilements, and makes them pure and beautiful for eternal life. The cross of our Saviour reminds us of the heavenly glory which he has purchased for us by the effusion of his precious blood. The cross of Jesus sweetens and lightens all the pains and afflictions of life, and prepares for us a glorious crown in heaven.

In conclusion, my dearly beloved, consider for a moment the glorified life which our Redeemer led from the time of his Resurrection to his Ascension into heaven ; and which he will continue to lead for ever in the glory of his kingdom. It is true, that we cannot lead this life of glory here on earth. Only in a spiritual manner can we imitate it, by following Christ with a soul elevated above the gross interests of this material, sensual sphere. But in the future, when the days of trial and purification are over, and we enter into our glory through the gate of death, then will the glorious life of Jesus Christ be fully revealed in us. Here, in the flesh, it must be our ever-present hope and desire, as well as our most powerful incentive, to resemble him, by walking in his footsteps, that with glorified soul and body, we may be united to him forever in his heavenly kingdom. May we, one day, receive from our heavenly Father this exceedingly great reward of our constancy in following Jesus Christ ! Amen.

BISHOP EHRLER.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

TRIBULATIONS.

“ You shall be sorrowful ; but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.”
(John 16 : 20.)

“ A little while, and now you shall not see me : and again, a little while, and you shall see me.” The disciples could not comprehend these words of Christ ; which seemed to them to contain contradictory meanings. They thought that, perhaps, our Saviour was about to disclose to them still greater mysteries ; as, a moment before, he had said to them : “ I have yet many things to say to you ; but you can not bear them now.” He knew full well that his absence would bring them great sorrow. And now, in order to assuage their grief, he tells them, beforehand, that he shall be absent from them only for a short time. He gives them to understand that this world is a scene of perpetual change, of alternate joy and sorrow, and that, even if the tribulations which are usually the cause of our sadness, should continue until the end of life, still, in the sight of God, this would only be a short period, after which our sorrow would be changed into everlasting joy. Thus, we may regard earthly trials either,

I. *From the side of those who suffer them ; or,*

II. *From the side of God, who sends them ; and in either case they should rather be called sources of rejoicing than of mourning.*

I. Looking at tribulations from a human point of view, we may contemplate them,

1. *In their present ; or,*

2. *In their future aspect.*

1. The interior joy which we experience in afflictions, far transcends the sorrow which they cause us. The Apostle St. Paul experienced continual tribulations, “ in prisons more frequently, in stripes above measure, in deaths often.” Of the Jews five times did he receive forty stripes, save one, (2 Cor. 11 : 23, 24) ; nevertheless, he confesses : “ I am filled with comfort, I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulations.” (1 Cor. 7 : 4.) And why is this? The Psalmist gives the reason thus : “ The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart.” (Ps. 33 : 19.) And God himself says : “ I am with him in

tribulation." (Ps. 90:15.) How can a Christian be seriously troubled when he reflects that "The God of all consolation, who comforteth us in all our tribulations," (2 Cor. 1:3), is with him to console him in all his trials?

2. We should, moreover, reflect "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us." (Rom. 8:18.) "For our present tribulation, which is momentary and light, worketh for us, above measure exceedingly, an eternal weight of glory." (2 Cor. 4:17.) Therefore, the Apostle says: "My brethren, count it all joy, when you shall fall into divers temptations." (James 1:2.) My dear Christians, do you not see then, that tribulations are not really afflictions, but, on the contrary, causes of rejoicing? Does not the Apostle St. James say: "Behold, we account them blessed who have suffered." (James 5:11.) Adverse circumstances should always produce in us, not sadness, but joy. In such cases, we may imitate the example of St. Paul, who describes himself as "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." (2 Cor. 6:10.) Our Saviour tells us plainly: "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy;" and he adds, for our greater consolation: "Your joy no man shall take from you." (John 16:22.)

II. If we contemplate our afflictions from *God's point of view*, they shall appear to us as agreeable rather than sad events:

1. *On account of their source*; and
2. *On account of their object*; since their source is the love which God bears toward us, and their object is the sanctification of our souls.

1. Let us remember these significant words of the Apostle: "My son, neglect not the discipline of the Lord; neither be thou wearied whilst thou art rebuked by him. For whom the Lord loveth, he chastiseth; and he scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." (Heb. 12:5, 6.) The sisters of Lazarus sent this message to the Lord: "Behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." Jesus, in answer, said: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God." (John 11:3, 4.) St. Chrysostom, commenting on this passage, says: "Many are sad, if sickness, or some other affliction overtakes them. Foolish people! these things generally happen to the friends of God. Was not Lazarus a friend of God, and was he not seized with a mortal illness?" "To you it is given for Christ, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake." (Phil. 1:29.) If you have no tribulation, then, you have not as yet begun to be a Christian. For the Apostle tells us, that, "all those who would lead a pious life in Christ, must suffer per-

secutions." If you, then, suffer nothing, it is greatly to be feared that you have not yet begun to lead a pious life in Christ. As soon as God willed to transform a Saul into a Paul he said : " I will show him how great things he must suffer for the sake of my name." (Acts 9 : 16.) Now, if afflictions are a sign that God loves us, why should we be affrighted at them in the future?

2. If tribulations come to us from God, why do we complain when " he himself hath done it ? " The divine intentions in sending us afflictions are most excellent. " We are chastised by the Lord, that we may not be damned with this world." (1 Cor. 11 : 32.) This is the meaning of the words of the Wise Man : " The rod and reproof give wisdom ; but the child that is left to his own will, bringeth his mother to shame." (Prov. 29 : 15.) Therefore, the prophet says : " Thou hast chastised me, and I was instructed." (Jerem. 31 : 18.) When God visits us, it is with the intention of testing and purifying us through tribulations ; for, as Solomon says : " Thou didst admonish and try them as a father." (Wis. 11 : 11.) " The furnace trieth the potter's vessels, and the trial of affliction, just men." (Ecclus. 27 : 6.) After the Lord had tested Abraham, and found him, under all circumstances, his faithful servant, he said : " Now I *know* that thou fearest God." (Gen. 22 : 12.) How could God have been assured of the fidelity of Tobias, if he had given him no opportunity of exhibiting his virtue ? The archangel Raphael said to Tobias : " Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee." (Job 12 : 13.) Thus, dearly beloved ! we see that tribulations are not evils, but merciful opportunities whereby God draws us to himself ; they are the crucial tests whereby we manifest our pure love and fidelity to our God.

But, have we, hitherto, entertained this opinion concerning tribulations ? No, otherwise, we would not have called them by this name. Well, then, let us, at least, in the future, hold it for a great gain when we are called upon to undergo various afflictions. Remember the sorrow that now oppresses you, will soon be turned into eternal joy. So long as we remain patiently upon the cross, God is certainly in us and with us. We can only be sure of his presence when we are in affliction. Who could stand firm in tribulation without his aid ? " Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." (Ps. 22 : 4.) But, when shall we be truly with thee, O Lord ? When our lives are transfigured in Christ. Meanwhile, he remains hidden, so that tribulations may come before death, and death before eternal glory. Then be consoled and satisfied, " for the Lord hath been bountiful to you," in sending you trials and afflictions !

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUE OF HOPE.

“So also you now, indeed, have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice; and your joy no man shall take from you.” (John 16: 22.)

When Jesus saw his disciples in grief and sorrow, because he had spoken to them of his approaching death, he encouraged them by the promise of everlasting joy: “Your heart shall rejoice; and your joy no man shall take from you. We infer from this that the thought of the eternal joy to come, is a strong and secure means of keeping up our courage in all trials and tribulations. This truth being of important consequence, I will explain to you,

- I. What is the virtue of Hope?
- II. What it effects in the soul; and
- III. Wherein its exercise consists?

I. *What is the virtue of Hope?* Hope is a supernatural virtue which, together with faith and charity, is infused into our souls by the Sacrament of Baptism.

1. It is one of the three theological virtues, because it has God for its immediate object, from whose bounty we hope for everlasting happiness. Our hope is founded on the unerring promises of God, on the pledges given us by the Incarnation of his only-begotten Son, and on our adoption as his children. Being convinced of our own inability to perform acts which merit heaven, we firmly hope for divine assistance. No less is it known to us that we must co-operate with this divine assistance, or grace, by faithfully observing the commandments; for heaven is not a present; it is a reward. On how many pillars then does our hope of heaven rest? On these two: the divine promise, and our own co-operation. The first is solid and immovable; the second is somewhat feeble and unreliable. Thence our hope is always accompanied with a holy and wholesome fear. We possess, therefore, the theological virtue of hope, when we expect with unswerving confidence, through the mercy of God, to obtain heaven, provided we, on our part, do what we are obliged to do.

2. From this you may infer how much two classes of people

deceive themselves : first, those who, although living in mortal sin, feel quite easy and secure in regard to their eternal salvation ; second, those who, although living in the state and habit of mortal sin, rely so fully upon certain devotional practices, in honor of the Saints, and particularly of the Blessed Virgin, as not to doubt that they will win heaven by their intercession. Such is not the theological virtue of hope, but devilish presumption—a rash and foolish expectation of salvation, without making use of the proper means to attain it. Adults can not be saved, unless they co-operate by their own merits with the merits of Jesus Christ. “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments,” said our Saviour in plain words. God’s promises are based upon avoiding sin and exercising virtue. True, God has promised forgiveness at whatever time the sinner becomes *converted* : “The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him, in what day soever he shall turn from his wickedness.” (Ezech. 33 : 12.) But the same God has threatened the sinner who defers his conversion to an indefinite time, with everlasting death. “Add not sin upon sin, and say not : The mercy of the Lord is great ; he will have mercy on the multitude of my sins. For mercy and wrath quickly come from him.” (Eccles. 5 : 5-7). God forgives the sinner whenever he repents of his sins, and is firmly resolved thenceforth to keep the divine commandments ; but he can not hope for mercy, as long as he continues living in sin.

3. With regard to the presumptuous confidence of sinners in the intercession and protection of the Saints, especially of the Blessed Virgin Mary, I say to you, with the Holy Church, that we have every reason to expect much from our Patron Saints, and still more from the Blessed Mother of God. None the less is it true, that not one of the Saints will even so much as attempt to save you, except by leading you back to the only road to heaven, *i. e.*, the keeping of the commandments. Consequently, certain prayers, alms, fasting, and the like, will not secure your salvation, unless you practise all with the intention of obtaining the grace to fulfil God’s holy will, and at the same time endeavor to keep his commandments. True, it is related of the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, and some others of the Saints, that, by their intercession they obtained salvation for great sinners at the end of their lives ; but you must not put your confidence in such examples. Assuming that they are true, they are miraculous instances of divine mercy and inscrutable wisdom. Nobody can hope to be saved by a miracle without being guilty of presumption.

II. *The virtue of Hope inspires us with courage and strength in accomplishing what seems arduous, and in patiently supporting afflictions.*

1. If the hope of earthly rewards encourages the husbandman, the artist, the soldier, the seaman, etc., to continue in their pursuits, and overcome all difficulties in their way, shall not the hope of everlasting joys animate and console the Christian ? What induced St. Paul, St. Anthony, St. Romuald, and their disciples to hide themselves in deserts, and to live there a life full of mortifications ? The hope of eternal felicity. What induced St. Alexius, Roch, Bernard and William, to forsake all worldly joys, riches, and honors ? The hope of everlasting glory. What consoled and cheered St. Lidwina when she patiently suffered uninterrupted pains for thirty-eight long years ? What encouraged St. Theresa to persevere in spite of her many afflictions of such long duration ? The hope of heavenly joys. The hope of Paradise has led thousands of martyrs through the most cruel torments to triumphant victory. What virtue was that which erected our monasteries and convents ? What induced thousands to live either secluded from the world, absorbed in the perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, or to spend their lives for the welfare of afflicted mankind ? The beautiful virtue of hope.

2. How is it that the same hope does not induce you to make sacrifices, or even to fulfil your most indispensable duties ? Why is it that, in spite of this glorious hope, there are many among us whose hearts cling to the earth, or are buried deeply in the mire ; as the avaricious, the intemperate, the unchaste ? Do you know why the hope of eternity so little influences such men ? Because they neither know nor reflect on the value of everlasting riches. Often meditate, therefore, my beloved, on the heavenly delights prepared for you ; the eternal repose of body and soul, the society of the Angels and the Saints, the vision of our Lord's sacred Humanity and of the Triune God, and, above all, on everlasting duration of all these joys.

III. We are strictly obliged to make acts of hope from time to time, but there are *special occasions on which it is very advisable to do so.*

1. When you are called on to perform a good work, to which you feel an *aversion*. For instance you dislike to go to Mass on a Sunday or holy-day of obligation, although you have no valid excuse for absenting yourself. Remember your eternal reward. You belong to a certain Sodality or Confraternity, and next Sunday is the appointed day for the monthly communion. You feel something like disgust ; you shrink from approaching the Sacraments. Remember your eternal reward, and go. The smallest good work done with the proper intention, will greatly increase your glory hereafter, and the least increase of eternal glory surpasses all the glory of this world.

2. When God visits you with sickness, poverty, or any other affliction, make acts of hope after the manner of St. Paul, who, in his many afflictions, consoled himself by saying : “ Our present tribulation, which is momentary and light, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory.” (2 Cor. 4 : 17.) Thus he never lost courage. “ In all things, we suffer tribulations, but are not distressed. We are cast down, but we perish not.” (2 Cor. 4 : 8, 9.) On the contrary, he rejoiced in his very tribulations. “ I am filled with comfort, I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulations.” (2 Cor. 7 : 4.)

3. When men revile you with words, and the devil attacks you with temptations, remember the words of our Saviour : “ Blessed are you when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, because your reward is very great in heaven.” (Mt. 5 : 11.) And if you withstand the attacks of your enemy, the words of the Lamb of God are addressed to you : “ To him that shall overcome, I will grant to sit with me on my throne.” (Apoc. 3 : 21.) This is so sure that St. James calls blessed *before death* the man who endures temptation. “ Blessed is the man who endureth temptation : when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love him.” (James 1 : 12.)

Two young men once met a hermit in his hermitage, which was hidden in the dense underwood. Finding him of good cheer, so much so that his face was illuminated with happiness, they asked for an explanation of his joyful heart. Whereupon, he led the visitors to the only window of his cell. It was so small, however, and surrounded by so many trees and bushes, that they could see only a little piece of the sky. “ Behold ! ” said the hermit, “ the explanation of my cheerfulness ! Whenever my life of penance seems too hard, I hasten to this window to look up to heaven, remembering the everlasting reward. Whenever Satan tempts me with the honors, riches, and joys of the world, I hasten to the window, to compare them with the heavenly honors, riches, and joys, awaiting me, if I persevere.” The two young men were overcome with emotion at the simplicity of the saintly old man ; and made the firm resolution often to remember heaven and its everlasting rewards. Let us do likewise, my beloved, and Paradise with all its joys will be ours.

J. B. CAMPAGELLI.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

SIN.

“And when the Paraclete shall come, he will convince the world of sin, and of justice, and of judgment. Of sin indeed; because they have not believed in me.” (John 16: 8.)

Is infidelity the only sin, for which the world will be punished by the Holy Ghost? St. Augustine gives the following answer to this question: “Certainly, if there was no unbelief, there would be no sin; because, if the just man lives according to this faith, he will abstain from sin. But, we must observe that there are different kinds of belief; and the belief that Christ was the Saviour, is not at all the same thing as to believe in Christ. The devil entertained the first belief, but not the second; for only those believe in Christ who hope in him and love him. Now, since the majority of so-called Christians, do not love Christ, but, on the contrary, insult him—all sins in a certain sense, may be called sins of unbelief. Let us, then, to-day, consider, with the light of faith,

- I. *The essence of sin; and,*
- II. *The effects of sin.*

I trust that when we have once understood the malice of sin, and its injurious effects, we shall not only fly from it for the future; but also believe in Christ by loving and serving him.

- I. Sin, in its essence is

1. *An insult; and,*
2. *An outrage against God.*

1. Mortal sin is the greatest insult that can be given. I can not better express its malice, than by saying that as God is the greatest Good, so sin is the greatest evil, and consequently, diametrically opposed to the supreme Good. The malice of sin consists chiefly in this: That the sinner, (as far as in him lies,) would annihilate God. Perhaps you cannot comprehend this, and you say: “I do not wish to injure God; I only desire to follow my own will and inclinations.” But, listen to me—the creature must depend upon the Creator: this is such an essential property of the creature, that God would not be God, if

there could exist a creature independent of himself. Sinner ! Do you wish to be your own master ? Then as far as in you lies, you rob God of his divinity ; since as the superior is not master when his servants disobey him, so, also, God would not be God, if you could withdraw yourself from his jurisdiction, and follow your own will in opposition to his.

2. It is easy to understand the malice of this outrage, if we consider who it is that is insulted, and who it is that offers the insult. God and man ! the Supreme being, and a worthless worm of the earth ! If daily experience did not teach us, we would find it impossible to believe that the outrage could take place. What folly would it not be in a beggar to resist a mighty king with a retinue of ten thousand followers ? Dearly beloved, how much more insignificant is man compared to God ! And if we add to this, that he whom we insult is our Creator, our Redeemer, our Benefactor—then the malice of the sinner, and the turpitude of sin are infinitely increased. God himself calls upon all creatures as witnesses of his astonishment at the boldness of the sinner : “ Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this : and ye gates thereof, be very desolate,” saith the Lord. “ For my people have done two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns, that can hold no water.” (Jerem. 2 : 12, 13.) By the mouth of the prophet Micheas the Lord further complains of this ingratitude, saying: “ O, my people, what have I done to thee, or in what have I molested thee ? Answer thou me, for I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and delivered thee out of the house of slaves.” (Mich. 6 : 3, 4.) O, my people, remember the kindness that I have shown thee ! Must not our hearts be harder than stones, if they are not touched by these pathetic words ?

II. The sinner,

1. *Kills his own soul ; and,*
2. *Renders himself deserving of eternal damnation.*

1. “ They that commit sin and iniquity are enemies to their own soul,” says Tobias. (Tob. 12 : 10.) The sinner injures himself more than the greatest tyrant, even Satan himself, could do. “ He that keepeth the commandment, keepeth his own soul.” (Prov. 19 : 16.) Tyrants may indeed kill the body, but they have no power over the soul ; and are not, therefore, according to the words of our Lord, to be feared. “ Fear not those that kill the body, and cannot kill the soul.” (Matth. 10 : 28). The sinner commits moral suicide ; “ for the soul that sinneth, the same shall die.” (Ezech. 18 : 4.) “ The wages of sin

is death." (Rom. 6: 23.) "By one man sin entered into this world and by sin, death." (Rom. 5: 12.) This doctrine is easily comprehended: for, St. Augustine says: "As the body is dead when it is separated from the soul, so, also, the soul is dead when it is separated from God. The life of the body is the soul; the life of the soul is God." When we depart from the world, we are not dead, but dissolved, as the Apostle declared when he exclaims: "I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ." But, when we commit sin, then, indeed, we are dead. Hence St. Gregory says: "It is real death when the soul is separated from God; but it is only a shadow of death when the soul is separated from the body."

2. The sinner deserves hell. Awful sentence! From the severity of the punishment, we may form some idea of the malice of the offense. I will not here speak of the actual tortures of the damned, but I will simply place before the sinner's eyes the anguish he must feel in knowing continually that he deserves hell—an anguish which is a certain most horrible foretaste of the torments of hell. The gnawing worm of conscience, the constant dread of an unprovided death, the melancholy reflection that he is an enemy of God, and that God is his enemy, these are truly the beginning of the everlasting agonies prepared for the reprobate. "I do not represent hell to you," says St. Augustine; "but see for yourself, if you are not already a hell to yourself." The Psalmist, giving his own experience as a sinner, says mournfully: "The torrent of iniquity troubled me, the sorrows of hell encompassed me," (Ps. 17: 5, 6.) "Although a sinner may seem happy," says St. Ambrose, "yet he spends his days sorrowfully, and in bitterness of soul." Those who sow the seeds of sin, shall reap the harvest of everlasting sorrow.

"My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just." (I. John 2: 1.) This is no other than he who, to-day, said to his disciples: "I go to him that sent me." He can do that which we are incapable of doing; if only when we have fallen, we call on him to help us out of the slough. Woe to you, if after a fall, you still pride yourself that you remain standing! Why are you so set upon your own destruction? You know the malice of sin and its ruinous consequences. It is not possible, unless the light of faith and reason is totally extinguished in you, that you should deliberately resolve to commit sin, and thus become your own enemy and the foe of God!

B.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD THE CHRISTIAN'S GAIN.

“It is expedient for you that I go.” (John 16: 5.)

In the days following the Resurrection, our Lord announced to his disciples his Ascension into heaven in these words : “ I go to him that sent me ; ” and their hearts were filled with sorrow. They had scarcely found him, and now they were to lose him again. Was their sorrow not justifiable and excusable? Our Saviour saw their sorrow and he consoled them, saying to them : “ It is expedient *for you* that I go.” If he had said : It is expedient *for me* that I go, they and we would have instantly comprehended his words. His mortal career was ended. He had finished his course, all was consummated, sin and hell overcome by his death on the cross ; what, then, was more in accordance with his life and his warfare against these enemies than that he should quit the arena, crowned with victory, and return gloriously to heaven. And after all he says not : It is expedient *for me*, but *for you* that I go.

It is the way of divine Providence to lead man, as it were, blind-folded to the goal, either of a particular period of his life, or to its close, and explain to him, then, why the special circumstances of his life were necessary and expedient for him. It will be a part of the joy and happiness of heaven to follow through eternity the controlling power of divine Providence in all the events and accidents of our mortal lives. Then will these words of our Saviour : It is expedient for you, be understood by all in their full truth and mercy.

In order to enliven your confidence in the divine Providence, which so often leads us by circuitous and mysterious ways, I will to-day call your attention to the disciples whom our Saviour was on the point of leaving, and I will endeavor to point out to you why it was expedient for them that our Lord should leave them, and why his Ascension was :

- I. *A blessing for the Apostles ;*
- II. *A blessing for the Church ; and*
- III. *A blessing for all Christians.*

I. *The departure of our Saviour was a blessing for the Apostles ; the greatest advantage for their faith in Jesus Christ, in his divine mission,*

and his kingdom upon earth. It purified and strengthened their faith and made it meritorious for heaven.

1. How wavering and imperfect had been heretofore the faith of the Apostles in the divinity and mission of Jesus Christ. In common with the Jewish people they entertained a false idea of the Messias and of his kingdom. They firmly believed that he would establish a great and powerful kingdom, and that they would be chosen to fill the first places therein. It was difficult for them to accustom themselves to the idea that their Master had come to establish a spiritual kingdom ; and that holiness, justice and true inwardness should form its foundations. Shortly before his bitter Passion, the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus, and falling down before him, adored him saying : “Master, say that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left, in thy kingdom.” (Matt. 20 : 21.) Even though the Lord told her and her sons and all his disciples that he would not found an earthly kingdom, though he said to them : “You know that the princes of the Gentiles lord it over them ; and they that are the greater, exercise power upon them. And it shall not be so among you,” (Matt. 20 : 25, 26) only with the greatest difficulty did the Apostles renounce their preconceived idea of a strong and powerful kingdom of the Messias upon earth. After so many instructions on the nature of his kingdom, and on the conditions necessary for an entrance into it, they still, after his Resurrection, asked him : “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1 : 6.)

Their faith had to be purified, and the departure of Jesus effected this better than all his words. He withdrew from them his visible presence, that presence upon which they had based all their fondest and most ardent hopes. Now they understood that his kingdom was not of this world, but a spiritual and supernatural kingdom. It was expedient for them that he went.

2. Many truths which Christ had taught them remained obscure and unintelligible to their minds. Even the belief in his divinity was shaken through his Passion and death. When he was apprehended in the garden of Olives, they all fled in terror ; and after his Resurrection, they sat sorrowfully and dismayed in the upper room of Jerusalem. “We had hoped that it was he who should have redeemed Israel,” sorrowfully said the two disciples who were going to Emmaus. (Luke 24 : 21.) The faith of the Apostles needed strengthening ; and not only did Christ to that end appear to them at various times and in various ways after his Resurrection, but he also ascended into heaven before their eyes. Every doubt of his divinity and of his mission from the Father

vanished from their minds as a mist before the sun. They had seen his glory, "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14.) It was, therefore, expedient for them that he departed from them.

3. His going, also, made their faith *meritorious for heaven, for eternal life*. They believed him, because of his personal presence. Their faith was founded upon the testimony of their senses. They saw with their own eyes the signs and wonders of the Saviour ; they heard with their own ears all his divine doctrines. Such a faith was not perfect nor meritorious. "Blessed are they that have not seen and have believed." (John 20:29.) "Faith is the conviction of things that appear not." (Hebr. 11:1.) That is perfect faith in its essence and meritoriousness, which rests upon the word of God, without the evidence of the senses, and which believes even against their testimony. For this reason did the Lord withdraw his visible presence from them, in order that all natural supports being removed, their faith might be perfect and meritorious for heaven. They were to believe in him without seeing with their eyes, without hearing him with their ears ; without feeling their hearts drawn to him by natural affection as to their friend. It was expedient for them that he should go.

Although we, like them, do not perceive this advantage at first sight, let us, at least, endeavor throughout life, to depend upon and trust in the wisdom of God and his Providence over us. In every situation let us cling to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and imagine we hear him saying to us : It is expedient for you, that this should happen. This thought, alone, is able to fill us with courage and the spirit of final perseverance.

II. *The departure of our Lord was a great blessing for the Church.* He himself had already declared it : "If I go not the Paraclete will not come to you ; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he shall come, he will convince the world of sin, and of justice, and of judgment."

1. The work of redemption was completed with the death of Christ. His blood was poured forth upon Calvary for the salvation of the world, and for the establishment of that holy Church which was to carry to the whole earth, ransom, mercy and truth. But the Church could not begin her mission and task immediately after the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ. The Holy Ghost had first to descend upon the Apostles, and through them upon every believer. As once, in the beginning of time, after the creation of heaven and earth, the spirit of God hovered over the waters ; as the spirit of God completed the creation by the Father and through the Son, and assisted in unfold-

ing and blossoming the germ of life in the world, as the Spirit of God was breathed into the first man, who lay before the Lord, as an image formed from the dust of the earth—so must he descend upon the Church of Jesus Christ, in order that this new creation of the Father and the Son might be perfected. Therefore the Lord said : “If I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you ; but if I go, I will send him to you.”

2. If we contemplate our holy Church in her life and labors upon earth, do we not see that it is the Holy Ghost who has always led her to victory ? The history of the Church during eighteen hundred years is a constant proof of the truth of these words : “ It is expedient for you that I go ; for if I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you ; but if I go, I will send him to you.”

Look at the very beginning of Christianity. Was it not good for the Church that Christ ascended into heaven and sent down the Holy Ghost ? Despondent and discouraged the Apostles sit in Jerusalem. They carry all the treasures of divine grace in their hands and in their mouths, and they are charged to deliver them to the whole world. But they dare not for fear of the Jews ; they dare not open their mouths to speak of Jesus Christ. But lo ! the Holy Ghost descends upon them, and they hasten forth boldly and fearlessly to all parts of the world, opening their treasures for the salvation of mankind.

Or look at those who, by the teaching of the Apostles, believed in Jesus Christ, were baptized in his name, and were obliged to preserve their faith amid the storms of the most bloody persecutions ! Look at a St. Stephen, a St. Lawrence, a St. Cosmas or St. Damian, a St. Fabian or Sebastian, a St. Agnes, a St. Agatha, a St. Lucy or a St. Cecilia, some of whom were burned alive, others roasted upon a gridiron, or died by rack, wheel, or sword, or ax. What strengthened and upheld them in their torments, in their cruel death ? One was near them, in them—the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, who led them triumphantly on to victory.

Look at the later times of the Church. A schism has arisen and in every century from Arius down to our own time, the world is divided into two great camps. The seamless robe of Christ, the one holy faith, is in danger of being rent asunder by dissensions. What can save the Christian faith and protect it from the spirit of the world, of error and of lies ? The successors of the Apostles, the bishops of the Church, meet together ; and when they are assembled, there stands One invisible in their midst who speaks through them,—the Holy Ghost, of whom our Saviour says : “ But when he, the spirit of truth, shall come, he will teach you all truth.”

3. Yes, the Holy Ghost has led the Church to victory, up to the

present day. She has not lost a single fragment from the wonderful temple of truth which the Saviour erected upon the earth. The foundation of the Church, her beauty and order, and all that she has created of greatness, sublimity and beneficence are the work of the Holy Ghost. "He will convince the world of sin, and of justice, and of judgment." Though we cannot understand the reason why the Holy Ghost should first come to complete the work of Jesus Christ, the whole history of the Church and her blessed activity amid all the storms are a great and enduring proof of the words of Jesus to his Apostles : "It is expedient for you that I go."

4. Since, then, the Church has lived through the promises of Christ and the assistance of the Holy Ghost, let her always be our strength and confidence in the storms which arise in our days, against the pillar and ground of truth. The Holy Ghost still lives in the Church. He is her invisible helper and support. The Scribes and Pharisees rejoiced in their wicked hearts when our Saviour was laid in the tomb, but their triumph was only of short duration. The Gentiles rejoiced when the Church of old bled from her thousand wounds of persecution ; but their triumph was ephemeral. Infidelity rejoiced when one heresiarch after another cut himself off from the Church, but its triumph was soon past. The world rejoiced when, during the French Revolution, our Holy Father was led a prisoner into France ; but the triumph was evanescent. And so it shall be with the seeming triumph of infidelity in our days. Even if, by God's permission, still darker days be in store for the Church of Christ,—the triumph of the world will still be vain and short-lived. "Behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world, ("Matt. 28: 20) said our Saviour, and the Holy Ghost will, also, abide with us until the end of time.

III. If we consider the words of our Lord : "It is expedient for you that I go," from another point of view, we will perceive that his going is *a blessing for all Christians individually*. It is true that we share in the blessings of the Apostles as well as in the blessings of the Church through the descent of the Holy Ghost. In this sense, we may apply to ourselves the words of Christ : It is expedient for you that I go. But there is still another individual gain for each of us in his departure. He went to prepare a place for us in the kingdom of his Father, therefore it is expedient for us that he went.

1. We are created for God. We are made to enter after this life into eternal happiness to enjoy the vision of God. This is the aim, the end and purport of our lives. Every creature is impelled, by an

interior force of its nature, to return to its first cause. Therefore, must we constantly repeat to ourselves those words, which our Saviour spoke to his disciples : "I go to my Father." (John 16: 16.)

2. Our bark of life floats rapidly down the stream of time toward the shores of Eternity. Even the longest life is short ; and there are only a few short steps to our Father. But who inspires us with the hope that we shall surely reach our goal ? Of ourselves, could we dare approach it ? We are sinful children of God, losing so easily the path to him by our trespasses, which create an insurpassable gulf between him and us.

3. The departure of Jesus assures us that we shall come to the Father through him. He is our Teacher and our safe Guide ; the Teacher who points out to us the way to heaven by his unerring word, and the Guide who precedes us upon this path. As of old, when the people of Israel were led through the desert to the Promised Land, the Lord went with them as a pillar of cloud by day, and as a pillar of fire by night,—so, also, Jesus Christ, by his Incarnation and his visible appearance among us in the flesh, is become our guide to heaven. He accompanies us with his lessons and admonitions through the desert of this life to the Promised Land of eternity. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one cometh to the Father, but by me." (John 14: 6.) His promise runs : "In my Father's house are many mansions : I go to prepare a place for you. And if I shall go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will take you to myself ; that where I am, you also may be." (John 14: 2, 3.) Our Lord is not only our Teacher and Guide upon the journey to eternity, but by his blood and his infinite merits he has filled the deep chasm which yawned between heaven and earth. He has removed every obstacle which our sins had raised up between God and men.

4. He has ascended into heaven as our Head, and where the head is, the members will follow, as it is for them that he implores the Father. And that this, our confidence that our dear Lord has ascended to his Father's house, to prepare a dwelling for us, might be raised to a fixed certainty, on his entrance into heaven he took with him those souls who languished in Limbo, so that in them he might exalt, in figure, redeemed mankind in the kingdom of his Father. Myriad streams of grace, moreover, flow uninterruptedly in the Church for us, so that all of us may arrive at that kingdom. Therefore it was expedient for us that Jesus should go ; for he has prepared a place for each one of us in heaven. His loss to the earth has thus become our greatest gain.

“I go to him that sent me.” These words of our Lord should accompany us in all our actions. May they strengthen us in all trials and temptations, and comfort us in all our sufferings. In all earthly vicissitudes and changes let us say: “I go to him that sent me.” As the eagle enticing her young to fly, and hovering over them, (Deut. 32: 11) so our Lord hovers over us and entices us toward the same bright goal. “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself.” (John 12: 32.) Let us avoid every sin, so that sanctified by the grace of Jesus Christ, at the end of life we may ascend to him that sent us into this world, and fully understand that the departure of Jesus was expedient for us and for our eternal salvation. Amen.

BISHOP EHRLER.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

PRAYER.

“Amen, amen, I say to you, if you ask the Father any thing in my name, he will give it you.” (John 16: 23.)

Nothing is so powerful with God as prayer. In a certain sense, it makes us almighty. For as God, by a word, created all things : “He spoke and they were made,” (Ps. 148: 5) so man, through prayer, can obtain every thing, “the Lord obeying the voice of a man.” (Jos. 10; 14.) To-day, our Saviour says to us : “If you ask the Father any thing in my name, he will give it you.” Or, still more plainly : “You shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be done to you.” (John 15: 7.) But how comes it that we pray so frequently, and still are not almighty ; that we ask so often and do not receive ? It is because we do not pray aright. If we pray,

- I. *With lively faith ;*
- II. *With deep humility ; and*
- III. *With sincere devotion,*

our prayers will be sure to pierce the clouds, and obtain a favorable answer.

- I. Faith teaches us chiefly :

1. *How we are to pray ; and*
2. *For what we must pray.*

1. The first requisite for prayer is a firm confidence. We frequently read in the Scriptures, that the granting of a petition is ascribed to this confidence. To the Chanaanite woman, our Saviour said : “O woman, great is thy faith : be it done to thee as thou wilt.” (Matth. 15: 28.) To the blind man he said : “Go thy way ; thy faith hath made thee whole.” (Mark 10: 52.) Speaking of the centurion, he said : “Amen, I say to you, I have not found so great faith in Israel.” (Matth. 8: 10.) Therefore, St. James admonishes us in these words : “But if any of you want wisdom, let him ask of God : . . . but let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.” (James 1: 5.) The disciples, in the midst of a tempest on the sea, cried out to our Saviour : “Lord, save us, we perish !” But Jesus, answering them, said : “Why are you

fearful, O ye of little faith?" (Matth. 8: 25, 26.) Thus he gave them an important lesson teaching them that faith should be fearless, and confidence unwavering, if we expect a favorable answer to our petitions.

2. Besides lacking this spirit of steadfast faith, our prayers are often unworthy of a Christian. Faith teaches us to seek first the kingdom of God; instead of which, we place the temporal before the eternal. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that our prayers are not heard; since they differ in nothing from the petitions of the heathens; "for after all these things do the heathens seek." (Matth. 6: 32.) The Psalmist says: "I sought the Lord, and he heard me." (Ps. 33: 5.) St. Augustine says: "David did not seek gold, or earthly things, when the Lord heard him; it is a very different thing to seek something from the Lord, and to seek the Lord himself." "Delight in the Lord, and he will give thee the desires of thy heart." (Ps. 36: 4.) I do not, by any means, wish to imply that we are never to ask God for any earthly goods, but, let us in this respect, follow the rule of faith by praying first for heavenly things,—by asking for Jacob's blessing, rather than for that of Esau. In Jacob's blessing, the dew of heaven was thought of before the fatness of the earth. "God gives thee of the dew of heaven, and of the fulness of the earth." (Gen. 27: 28.) In Esau's blessing, on the contrary, the fatness of the earth was spoken of before the dew of heaven. "In the fat of the earth, and in the dew of heaven from above, shall thy blessing be." (Gen. 27: 39.)

II. Humility in prayer should teach us,

1. *Who it is to whom we pray; and*

2. *Who we are that pray.*

1. St. Bernard says that in prayer, man should consider the goodness and the glory of God; the goodness with which, (without any merit on our part) he hears us, and the glory by which he is able to grant us all things for which we pray. As his goodness should encourage and animate our faith, so, also, his glory should render us humble. "God resisteth the proud." And how can a proud man comfort himself with the thought that he will be heard, when he knows that he is detestable in the sight of God, and that, on the contrary, it is written of the humble, "He giveth grace to the humble." (James 4: 6.) Is not this the proper method of obtaining favors from the mighty of this world? If we wish to obtain a favor from any earthly king or ruler, do we not approach them in the spirit of humility? Is it not, then, eminently proper that we should appear as humble suppliants before the

King of kings and Lord of lords? Of our Saviour, alone, do we read that "he was heard for his reverence," (Hebr. 5:7) that is, he was heard on account of the dignity and reverence of his person.

2. But who are we, miserable men! We are nothing of ourselves, and are deserving of nothing but punishment. "Deep calleth on deep," (Ps. 41:8) that is, the abyss of human misery calls to the abyss of divine mercy. When we contrast our utter insignificance with God's omnipotence, what is it but like comparing a gnat to a mastodon? Some such thought was in Abraham's mind when he humbly exclaimed: "I will speak to my Lord, whereas I am dust and ashes." (Gen. 18:27.) If we take into consideration our own nothingness, and the multitude of our sins, we may well entertain sentiments of humility in the presence of God. I do not wish, by these words, to deprive the sinner of his firm confidence in God, but only to remind him that, when he prays, he should not deport himself as a just man.

III. The third condition of a good prayer is *devotion*. We are only sincere when we pray,

1. With fervor; and

2. With perseverance.

1. What is prayer? A conversation of the soul with God. Hence, we should be as attentive, as fervent in prayer, as if we stood in the visible presence of God. When we begin to pray, by a lively act of faith, we must place God before our eyes. Therefore, the Psalmist says: "The meditation of my heart is always in thy sight." (Ps. 18:15.) "Let my prayer come in before thee." (Ps. 87:3.) "All the kindreds of the Gentiles shall adore in his sight." (Ps. 21:28.) "All they that go down to the earth, shall fall before him." (Ps. 21:30.) "It is true," says St. Chrysostom, "that we pray often; but we do not pray as if we were in the presence of God. If we move our lips, we speak, but know not what we say. Does this deserve to be called prayer, which is performed with vain words and distracted thoughts?" Might not Christ frequently address to us those words with which he reproached the Pharisees: "This people honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me?" (Matth. 15:7.) How can you expect that God will hear you, when you do not hear yourself? You wish that God should pay attention to your prayer, and you, yourself, are not attentive to what you say!

2. Although, occasionally, we pray with fervor, yet we do not per-

severe in prayer. We wish to be heard without delay. Are, then, the gifts of God of so little value that we can not wait for them? Do we not read, "If it, (the vision of the Lord) make any delay, wait for it; for it shall surely come, and it shall not be slack." (Hab. 2:3.) "Expect, expect again." (Isai. 28:10.) "The continual prayer of a just man availeth much;" says St. James. (James 5:16.) We must imitate the example of the Apostles, of whom it is written: "All these were persevering with one mind in prayer with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brethren." (Acts 1:14.) And, even although our fervent and persevering prayers may not be answered, we must yet be resigned, remembering the sentiments of St. Augustine: "It is no favor when God answers us according to our will and not according to our advantage. The Israelites were heard according to the will but, while the food was still in their mouths, they died. In many cases it is an angry God who answers us, when a loving God would not listen to us."

We are now instructed in the principal duty of Christianity; for prayer is the proper office of the Christian; it is his only help and consolation. His origin, his nothingness, his nature, his needs, the place of his exile, his trials and tribulations, all teach him that he must pray, and "pray without ceasing," according to the precept of the Apostle. St. Bernard assures us that he to whom we pray treasures up our prayers. Before we have closed our lips he has inscribed our request in the Book of Life. We may entertain a certain hope of his favorable regard upon two grounds: Either that he will grant us what we have prayed for, or else, that he will bestow upon us something more profitable to us, both for time and for eternity.

B.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER OFFERED IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

“Amen, amen, I say to you ; if you ask the Father any thing in my name he will give it you.” (John 16:23.)

“I will not leave you orphans ; I will come to you.” (John 14:18.) With these words, our blessed Lord endeavored to console his disciples, when he announced to them his approaching departure. And he left neither them nor us orphans. To them and to us, he left his all-powerful grace to support and strengthen us in the manifold trials and temptations of this miserable life. In his holy Church, with all her unspeakable treasures, he continues his blessed life ; and in the holy Sacrament of the Altar, he abides amongst us as a living God. Moreover, that our joy might be full, he has also given us another means, by which we might draw close to him at all seasons and in all places, viz : “*Prayer*,” so that the union between God and man might be strengthened and perpetuated. “Amen, amen, I say to you ; if you ask the Father any thing in my name, he will give it you.” When we pray in the name of Jesus, we turn the golden key which opens to us heaven and all its graces.

Prayer, as the language and immediate expression of religion, is as ancient and essential as religion itself. The heathen prostrated himself before false gods and prayed aloud to them for aid in his necessities. The Jew went up to the Temple in Jerusalem, to pray. The Samaritan prayed on Mount Garizim. The Mahomedan raises his eyes to heaven, praising *Allah* and his great prophet. But Christianity, alone, possesses the true knowledge and most perfect practice of prayer. The Christian not only knows the existence, the perfections and the attributes of the God whom he worships ; but he has learned the science of prayer from the God-Man himself, and has been taught to pray for all things in the name of Jesus. The power of that blessed name gives to a Christian’s prayer a distinctive meaning and immense value. Hence, the Church concludes all her prayers with the name of Jesus. All her petitions for grace and every good gift end with these words : “Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with the Father and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth one God for ever and ever,” or simply “Through Christ our Lord.” Examining the subject more closely, we shall discover :

I. *How sublime is that prayer which is offered in the name of Jesus ;*
and

II. *What is demanded of us in order to pray in the name of Jesus.*

I. When the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush, he said to him : “ Come, and I will send thee to Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt. And Moses said to God : Who am I that I shall go to Pharaoh, and should I bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt ? ” (Exod. 3 : 10.) We might apply to ourselves these words of Moses when we approach God in prayer. Who are we that we dare appear before the infinite God, the King of kings, before whom the Angels lie prostrate and veil their faces with their wings ? What are we but rottenness (Job 25 : 6) and misery ? Conscious of our unworthiness we cannot help seeking some powerful mediator to plead our cause before the throne of God. Hence, we raise our eyes in humble supplication to the Saints in heaven that they may second the weak petitions of our lips, and aid us by their potent intercession. But holy faith assures us that there is no safer or surer way of approaching God than by the name of Jesus. There is no more powerful mediator for man with the Most High than our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. “ If you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you,” he himself has said. If, therefore, the Church invokes the Saints of heaven, and exhorts her children to pray to them, she, nevertheless, mounts above and beyond the brilliant company of the virgins, the goodly array of the confessors, the glorious army of martyrs and Apostles, the resplendent choirs of the holy Angels, yea, even the throne of the Blessed Virgin herself, in order to place her petitions in the hands of Jesus Christ himself. Every prayer she addresses to her Saints closes with the same words : “ Through Jesus Christ, our Lord.” And she has good authority for all this. She relies on the promise of Christ and the power of the holy name of Jesus. She is convinced there is no name in heaven or upon earth more acceptable to God, nor more sublime, gracious and efficacious for the Christian lips to pronounce than that of Jesus.

I. The name of Jesus is, of all names, the *most acceptable* to God ; for it is the name of his only begotten Son, “ who is the splendor of his glory and the figure of his substance.” (Heb. 1 : 3.) He is the only object really worthy of the love of the Father, as he himself bore testimony at the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus. “ This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” (Matt. 3 : 17) cried out the voice from heaven, on both these solemn occasions ; and St. Paul declares that “ Wherefore God also hath exalted him, and hath

given him a name which is above every name : that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow of those that are in heaven, on earth and in hell." (Phil. 2 : 9,10) The more, therefore, we praise and honor this name, so dear to the heart of God, so much the more acceptable will our prayers be to him.

2. The name of Jesus is the most *sublime* name, for it is the name of the *infinite God and Creator*. "All power is given to me in heaven and on earth," (Matt. 28 : 18) said our Lord to the Apostles. "All things were made by him ; and without him was made nothing that was made," said his beloved disciple, St. John. (John 1 : 3.) "By whom also," says St. Paul, "he made the world." (Hebr. 1 : 2.) "All things whatsoever the Father hath, are mine." (John 16 : 15.) The sublime significance of the name of Jesus has been immeasurably exalted by the Father since his only begotten Son accomplished the redemption of the world. He has elevated the name of Jesus above all names and has made it the only saving name. Therefore, when we pray in his name, we have a sure guarantee of obtaining our request.

3. The name of Jesus is the *most gracious* name. He employs the infinite merits which he acquired by his Passion and death, in order to strengthen through them our prayers at the throne of God. His sacred blood and wounds cry for us to the Father for mercy. He himself sits at his right hand, and bears the marks of his wounds in his glorified body, in order to show them to his Father when we ask him anything in the name of Jesus. Think you the Father will despise and refuse the voice of the blood and wounds of his only begotten Son ? Will he not, on account of the merits of Jesus, grant to us what we, on account of our sinfulness, do not deserve ? An earthly king regards the merits of noble ancestors ; and he is graciously and amiably disposed toward the descendants of those who have done great things for state and throne. The king of heaven and earth will graciously regard our prayer when the whole price of redemption is given and employed in our behalf by the Son of God himself. "The Lord is rich to all that call upon him ; for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Rom. 10 : 12,13.) As Jacob, covered with a strange garment, received the blessing which did not belong to him by right, so we, clothed with the garment of the grace of Jesus Christ, washed from our sins in his blood, and fragrant with the odor of his merits, receive, though unworthy, all the blessings of heaven.

4. But in order to convince you more thoroughly of the efficacy of prayer offered in the holy name of Jesus, I will add that we have every

right to cry out to heaven in that blessed name. This name belongs to us, and it suits our lips better than any other name in which we pray. This is no strange and meaningless title. It is the name of the Saviour who died upon the cross for us, and who has made us members of his Church that we might be one with him. Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we are united most intimately with him ; and through him, with his heavenly Father. Yes, we are even his children, and the object of his love and pleasure. Therefore, our Lord says : “If you remain in me, and my words remain in you ; you shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be done to you.” (John 15 : 7.) “If any one love me he will keep my word ; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make an abode with him.” (John 14 : 23.) “Amen, amen, I say to you, he that believeth in me, the works that I do, he shall do also, and greater than these he shall do.” (John 14 : 12.) Stamped with the image of Jesus Christ, co-heirs to his holy kingdom, members of his sacred body, penetrated with his life, we pray not with our own voice, but with the voice of Christ himself, whose prayer, since “with inexpressible sighs” he prays in us and cries out for us to the Father, will surely be heard.

With justice, then, did our Saviour say to his Apostles : “*Hitherto you have not asked anything in my name.*” Up to the hour of their divine Master’s death and Ascension into heaven, the full meaning of the name of Jesus was hidden from them. But after the redeeming sacrifice of Calvary was accomplished, and our Lord had returned to the bosom of his heavenly Father, enlightened by the Holy Ghost, they clearly understood the power of the name of Jesus. In this name they wrought signs and wonders ; in it they taught and preached ; in it they prayed and blessed ; administered the Sacraments, and established the kingdom of God on earth. And our holy Mother, the Church, continues, through all time, invoking the name of Jesus, and glorifying it as the sweetest, holiest, and most sublime name in heaven and upon earth.

II. Powerful, however, as is the name of Jesus, how seldom, alas ! is genuine prayer offered in that adorable name ! Much is required in order to pray properly in the name of Jesus. Such a prayer must be made in the spirit of Christ, according to his teaching, his will, and his example. To pray in his spirit, means to pray as he prayed. In order to understand this, let us consider the *object* of the prayer of Jesus, and the *manner* of his prayer.

1. What was the object of the prayer and supplication of our Lord ? He did not pray for earthly things, nor for the vain goods of this world ; there was nothing selfish in his desires or longings ; the only

object of his prayer was the honor and glory of his 'heavenly Father. All his supplications tended to this grand object. Thence they derived their nourishment, life, and power. Look at that beautiful fruit of his sacred heart and mind, the "*Our Father* ;" that divine summary of all prayer. "Hallowed be thy name ! Thy kingdom come ! Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven ;" thus he teaches us to pray. The name of God should first of all be hallowed and praised. All creatures must acknowledge and praise him in every possible way. His kingdom, his grace and his glory are ever to grow and to be extended over the earth, and heaven and earth must, alike, strive faithfully to fulfil his will, and pay him the highest homage. Only after we have done all this, may we ask for earthly things.

Where shall we find the Christian penetrated with this spirit of real prayer ? There are, no doubt, many prayers said now-a-days ; our churches are filled with pious people, our altars are surrounded with devout worshippers. Who can count the fervent supplications which, unheard by mortal ears, ascend hourly to heaven ? We thank God a thousand times, that even in this age, when faith is so cold or tepid, prayer, at least, is practised so zealously. But go around, if you will, listen attentively to the prayers which ascend from the majority of these kneeling supplicants. Penetrate into the secret desires and longings of their hearts, and then say whether their prayers are offered in the spirit of Christ. Are not the perishable goods of this life the ground-work of all their petitions to God ? Always the same lamentations about temporal concerns, but we hardly ever think of God's glory in heaven, of the honor of his holy name, or of the extension of his kingdom upon earth.

Who shall excite in us such a prayer in the spirit of Jesus Christ ? Only the spirit of Christ which has been given us, and through which, alone, we can cry out to heaven is an acceptable prayer, "For you have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear : but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry : *Abba, Father.*" (Rom. 8 : 15.) The first inspiration to real, true prayer, proceeds from the spirit of Christ. He is, through the Holy Ghost, the source and inexhaustible fountain of all prayer, irresistibly enticing us to long after heavenly things. He carries the soul beyond the clouds, making her forget all earthly concerns and temporal cares, and impelling her to make the honor and glory of God the sole end and object of her prayer. Keeping that sublime end in view, if we pray for temporal goods, they are only desired as means to the end. Thus, shall we pray as our Saviour and Model, whose life on earth was a continual, unceasing prayer. This life was a constant intercourse with his heavenly Father, and when this intercourse was seemingly interrupted

for a time by the exterior labors and duties of his holy mission, his soul was secretly soaring up on the wings of prayer to heaven. From his infancy he loved the house of the Lord. Faithful to the statutes of Moses, he went up, at the appointed times, with his parents to Jerusalem, there to join openly with the people in the worship of his Father in heaven. So enamored was he with the sanctuary of the Holy of Holies, that once in his childhood, he remained in it three days and three nights. And when his father and Mother after an anxious search found him there, and seemed to reproach him for his absence he answered them thus : "Why have you sought me ? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business ?" (Luke 2 : 49). He spent forty days and nights in constant prayer and fasting in the desert. In his travels through Judea, he withdrew after the labors of the day to the solitude of the mountains, and there spent whole nights in prayer. And what shall I say of his prayer in the Garden of Olives.

Our life should, also, be a continual unceasing prayer, an uninterrupted intercourse of the soul with God. We must fulfil the words of the Apostle : "Pray without ceasing." This does not mean that we must have our beads always in our hands, that we must be always on our knees, or that our tongues must be ever busy with vocal prayer. All these things are irksome to the weak and volatile spirit of man. We must make a good intention, every morning, to do all for the greater honor and glory of God. If we do so, our work, our recreation, yea even our sleep, and our meals will resolve themselves into very excellent prayers. As the Apostle says : "Whether you eat, or drink, or whatever else you do, do it for the honor of God."

2. Our prayer in order to be acceptable to God must have still another quality. We must pray like Jesus, and according to his example, with confidence in God, with patience and resignation. An unbounded confidence is expressed in every prayer of our Lord. "Father," he exclaims in the Garden of Olives, "all things are possible to thee ; take away this chalice from me, but not what I will, but what thou wilt." (Mark 14: 36.) "Thinkest thou," he said to Peter, when the latter would have defended him from his enemies by force of arms, "that I can not ask my Father, and he will give me presently more than twelve legions of angels ?" (Matt. 26 : 53.) The Son of God best knew the omnipotence, wisdom, and love of his heavenly Father ; and he also knew that his mighty will could not be resisted. In the consciousness of equal greatness and power, he appears before his Father, and commands the very essence of the God-Head. And yet, how submissive, at the same time, was his prayer to his Father. In unconditional resignation, he subjects himself to his will. "Father, if it be possible," he says, "if it correspond with your divine purpose and will, let this chalice pass away from me ; but not my will but thine be done." I fully sub-

ject and resign my will in all things to thine. "Yea, Father; for so hath it seemed good in thy sight," (Matt. 11: 26.)

Our prayers must breathe forth a like spirit of confidence and resignation. Instructed by Christ in the nature and attributes of the Almighty God, we may resign ourselves to him with the greatest security that our prayers will be heard and our requests granted. God's omnipotence, before which all creatures bow, his wisdom which directs all earthly things; his goodness and love which are ready to give us that which his omnipotence and love have prepared for our salvation, all guarantee the granting of our requests. Jesus Christ himself, in whose name and spirit we pray, must raise our confidence still more: "He that spared not even his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how hath he not also, with him given us all things?" (Rom. 8: 32.) However, he who prays in the spirit of Jesus Christ, will, notwithstanding his firm confidence of the granting of his requests, say with Jesus: "Not my will but thine be done." ("Luke 22: 49.) The weakness of our intellect, the short-sightedness of our mental vision, but still more the misery of our sinful hearts, must move us to subject our will to the will of God. Our boundless patience and confidence in God must be fenced in by a boundless resignation of spirit.

Thus the grace and power of the name of Jesus Christ shall produce its blessed effects, and secure a favorable answer to all our prayers. "All whatsoever you do in word or work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." (Col. 3: 17.) May the holy name of Jesus be continually on our lips, may it repose on our tongues, and dwell for ever in our hearts, sanctifying them and securing for us the grant of every prayer we offer to the Father of lights, the Giver of all good gifts. Amen.

BISHOP EHRLER.

THE FEAST OF THE ASCENSION.

HOPE.

“He was taken up into heaven.” (Mark 16: 19.)

The festival we celebrate to-day, is the end and aim of all the preceding feasts: the glorious conclusion of the life of the Son of God upon earth. The very same Jesus who descended to earth to take flesh for our redemption has to-day ascended into heaven to exalt that flesh to the right hand of the Eternal Father. Let our hearts ascend there with him. We are the body, and he is our Head; hence, being our Head, we, his members, entertain the hope that we shall eventually follow him to that bright abode whither he has preceded us. Our Saviour, our Comforter, our All has left us, and we might, indeed, remain inconsolable for his loss, but mark well the reason which Christ gives for his departure: “I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am, you also may be.” (John 14: 2, 3.) It is hope alone that can console us in this valley of tears. A consolation which is truly very great,

- I. *With regard to God who inspires it; and,*
- II. *With regard to man who receives it.*

Beloved brethren! if we fully comprehend the basis of our hope, to-day's sermon should sweeten all the bitterness of this miserable life.

I. The divine comfort arising from the virtue of hope is contained in these two facts:

1. *God wills our salvation.*
2. *God helps us to attain it.*

I. “The Son of God who descended from heaven, does not grudge heaven to us,” says St. Augustine; “on the contrary, he exclaims to us: Become my members, if you would ascend into heaven.” This fact, that we are destined for heaven, should fill us with consolation. “Casting all your solicitude upon him, for he hath care of you.” (1 Peter 5: 7.) “He wills that all men should be saved.” This will of God for our eternal happiness is all-powerful, and strongly encourages us to place our hope and confidence in him. “Believe God, and trust in him.” (Eccl. 2: 6.) He has not merely promised, but has given abundant proofs of his ability and desire to keep his promise, for, as the Apostle of the Gentiles says, “meaning more abundantly to show

to the heirs of the promise, he interposed an oath : that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have the strongest comfort." (Hebr. 6 : 17.) To the end that we may understand by this, no other hope save that of which we are now speaking, the Apostle, continuing, declares that we should "hold fast the hope set before us, as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm, which entereth even within the veil where the fore-runner Jesus is entered for us." (Hebr. 6 : 18-20.) The sanctuary, or Holy of Holies, was concealed by the interior veil of the temple. This is a figure of heaven. Jesus here is called the fore-runner, by the Apostle, in order to console us, and make us capable of following him thither.

2. The actual help of God follows fast upon the earnest desire of his children for help ; and I may add for the strengthening of this proposition, that it is impossible for hope in God's assistance to fail. "Know ye," says the Wise Man, "that no one hath hoped in the Lord and hath been confounded." (Eccl. 2 : 11.) David, therefore, cries out with unwavering confidence : "In thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me never be confounded." (Ps. 30 : 1.) And St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, gives us his grounds for this infallible hope, saying : "Hope confoundeth not, because the charity of God is poured out into our hearts, by the Holy Ghost who is given to us." (Rom. 5 : 5.) "The Holy Ghost is given to us !" "How can this hope fail when we have so precious a pledge in our possession ?" says St. Augustine. This is the real difference between hope in man and hope in God ; the former may fail, but the latter never fails. "If you have been confounded, if your hope has ever deceived you," says St. Augustine, "you have set your hope upon one who can lie, deceive and mislead ; but if you place your confidence in God, you shall never be confounded nor deceived, because you trust in him who neither can deceive nor be deceived."

II. The hope of heaven imparts to man,

1. *Great interior consolation in the miseries of this life ;* and,
2. *An invincible strength in tribulations.*

1. Since the deplorable fall of our first parents, labor and misery are so surely and persistently the portion of humanity, that we cannot be men without being miserable. "No sooner are we born than we begin to weep, and justly so," says St. Bernard, "because we have come into a valley of tears, and in these miseries our best consolation is 'to hold fast the hope set before us.'" (Hebr. 6 : 18.) "We rejoice in hope," says the Apostle, "even though our condition be sad

and beset with tribulations." (Rom. 12: 12.) "Let all be glad that hope in thee," (Ps. 5: 12) exclaims the Psalmist,—knowing well that interior joy is always associated with this hope. We must, it is true, earn our bread with father Adam in the sweat of our brow, but even in the midst of our labors, we are not without comfort. Consequently, the Psalmist not only says: "Thou shalt eat the labors of thy hands;" but he adds: "Blessed art thou, and it shall be well with thee." (Ps. 127: 2.) Why is it thus? "Labor is not without joy, through hope," is the answer of St. Augustine, "for he that trusteth in the Lord shall be blessed." (Prov. 16: 20.) Work delights and makes us joyous, because of the hope of reward which continually springs within us,—a confidence as assured as if we already possessed that for which we hope. "If God is with us, who shall be against us?" And toiling and sweating over our daily labor, we rely upon the promise of the Eternal Truth who neither can deceive nor be deceived.

2. But not satisfied with being our solace in the midst of the universal miseries of life, Christian hope consoles and strengthens us in the extraordinary accidents and tribulations to which we are liable. St. Paul is an unexceptionable witness to this truth. He does not say I am cast down under difficulties, I am surfeited with tribulations, but: "I take pleasure in my infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am powerful." (2 Cor. 12: 10.) He realized by actual experience what the Psalmist also said of himself: "I have put my trust in the Lord, and shall not be weakened." (Ps. 25: 1.) "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Sion; he shall not be moved forever that dwelleth in Jerusalem." (Ps. 124: 1.) Isaías speaks in like manner when he says: "They that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall take wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary, they shall walk, and not faint." (Is. 40: 31.) This confidence, this firm hope, removes all difficulties from our pathway, and makes labor easy. Yes; it almost changes impossibilities into possibilities. Why should not all things be possible to the man who trusts unhesitatingly in the aid of the all-wise and Almighty God? With what confidence does not the Apostle exclaim: "I can do all things in him who strengthens me." (Phil. 4: 13.) The omnipotence of God is nowhere more perceptible, than when it renders all-powerful the weak creatures who trust in him. "Take hope away," says St. Ambrose, "and patience itself ceases to be patient; but where there is hope neither external conflicts nor interior anxiety can do any harm, for hope strengthens the soul so that it can not be moved by the billows of earthly confusion."

Recognizing the great advantages of Christian hope,—you are

naturally charmed, my dearly beloved, with the excellence of this virtue. But is your approval a practical one? Have you a good foundation for your hope? Is your conscience free from sin? Mark well its conditions,—lacking which, hope is not hope, but presumption. “Hope excludes all vice,” says St. Cassian, in his spiritual maxims; and the Evangelist further declares that, “if conscience do not reprehend us, we have confidence toward God, and whatsoever we shall ask, we shall receive of him.” (1 John 3: 21.) The Psalmist also says: “Mercy shall encompass him who hopeth in the Lord, and he shall not sin.” (Ps. 31: 23.) As a bad conscience is full of despair, so is a good conscience full of hope. He who is in the state of grace, alone, truly hopes; but he who knows himself to be guilty, permits hope to die out of his heart, and can expect nothing but damnation. From which terrible fate may our good God preserve us all, through Jesus Christ, the source of eternal hope! Amen.

THE ASCENSION.

THE DIVERSITY OF THE ELECT.

“In my Father’s house there are many mansions.” (John 14:2.)

Through the first sin was heaven closed against all the children of men, and not one of the millions who died before the coming of Christ could enter therein. But when the Saviour of the world had overcome Satan, sin, and death by his death upon the cross, and his glorious Ascension into heaven, not to, or for him alone, were the golden portals of Paradise opened. No, entering heaven, he was accompanied by the countless multitude of the just, whose souls had, hitherto, like holy prisoners, been detained in Limbo, waiting for their redemption. Hence, the Apostle writes: “Ascending on high, he led captivity captive,” (Ephes. 4:8)—that is, at his Ascension, he himself led as precious captives into heaven those who had been detained for ages in the dreary captivity of Limbo. With what an ecstasy of jubilation must those holy souls have entered at last into the beautiful celestial mansions!

For us, my brethren, their entrance into heaven is also a great joy; for it foreshadows to us the glory and happiness which is destined and reserved for us as well. For this reason the Apostle, after saying that Christ himself led into heaven the souls that had been detained in Limbo, adds: “*He gave gifts to men*”—that is, to us men who are yet sojourning here on earth Christ gives rich graces that we, in our turn, may also merit heaven. And as our Lord once consoled his disciples who were sad on account of his approaching departure from them, so he also consoles us with these encouraging words: “Let not your hearts be troubled In my Father’s house there are many mansions” (John 14:1, 2.) Yes, let countless millions of children of men be born and live upon earth, and though they may differ in race, sex, age, talents and state of life, for all are mansions prepared in heaven; and if we only make ourselves worthy of that blest abode, each one of us will receive the mansion, the place, the glory, and happiness which his virtues and fidelity may merit. Let us consider this a little more closely to-day in those who have already entered into heaven; and to that end permit me to show you:

- I. *That among the elect there exists a remarkable diversity;*
- II. *Whence this diversity comes; and*
- III. *What it teaches us.*

I. When the Apostle, St. John, in a vision, beheld the heavenly Jerusalem, he “saw a great multitude which no man could number” (Apo. 7 : 9)—the multitude of Saints who chant their everlasting Alleluja before the throne of God and of the Lamb. In effect, it must be a numberless multitude at present (not to speak of those who up to the end of time shall be admitted into heaven).

1. Let us take first only the great Saints *whose names are known to us, who have been canonized, whose memory the Church celebrates.* The Roman martyrology mentions a great number for every day of the year ; and always adds that on this day are commemorated very many other holy martyrs, confessors, virgins, *et cætera.*

2. How many Saints, moreover, are there *whose names have escaped the memory of men !* As you know, soon after the Ascension of our Lord, began the bloody persecutions of the Church which, with a few short interruptions, lasted for almost three hundred years. Who can count all the holy martyrs who, by the most cruel torments, the most heroic deaths, gave testimony for Christ and obtained the palm of heavenly glory ? I shall only adduce a few examples that you may be able to form some idea of it.

When, in the city of Lyons, the holy bishop Irenæus laid down his life for the faith, 19,000 Christians were martyred with him (not, it is true, on the same day, but in the same persecution). Again, in Syria, the heathens, in order to make quick work of their bloody designs, set on fire in various places a city whose inhabitants were Christians, and burned all the faithful therein. The ancient Church historian, Eusebius, who himself was the witness of the most savage persecutions, relates that in the Thebaid (a part of Egypt) for several years, twenty, thirty, and even as high as a hundred Christians were slaughtered every day ; so that the executioners were worn out and their swords grew dull. In the city of Rome alone the graves of 2,500,000 martyrs have been found ! How great then must be the number of all the Christians of the earth who, in the first three centuries of the Church, shed their blood for the faith ! And even in these latter days how many thousands have obtained the crown of martyrdom in China and Japan !

These are only the martyrs. Now, take the far greater number of Christians who have faithfully served God in their respective states all over the world, and whose souls now enjoy in heaven the reward of their fidelity. Truly, “a great multitude which no man can number.”

3. All those who belong to this great multitude are alike in this—*that they died in the grace of God, were entirely free from every stain of sin, and now enjoy the vision of God and eternal beatitude.* But in another

respect there is a very great and marvelous diversity to be found in them. They differ in age, sex, race, and rank. Some have sanctified themselves in early youth, some in mature manhood ; some have been virgins consecrated to God ; others married women or widows, heads of families. These became Saints among Christian, educated nations ; those under a people which was almost savage and pagan. Some have obtained the palm of victory as children, as St. Romanus, who was martyred at the age of three years. Others died in the bloom of youth, as St. Aloysius and St. Agnes ; others, again, were called to their reward in old age, as St. Simeon, who was crucified in his one hundred and twentieth year.

4. There are among the Saints those who spent their whole life, from their tenderest years, in innocence and holiness, as St. Stanilaus, St. Catharine of Sienna, St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi, and many others. Others, after they lived for a time in levity and sin, turned to God, as St. Andrew Corsini, St. Jerome *Æ*melius. There are even those who have been grievous and scandalous sinners, as St. Augustine, who had been for many years a heretic and a libertine ; or the Abbot Moses, who, before his conversion, had committed adultery and highway robbery. But pray do not forget (the good thief on the cross excepted), I know no one among the Saints who was converted on his death-bed, or in the last moments of his life.

5. There is a great diversity also with regard to the vocations or conditions of life in which the elect served God and sanctified themselves. As I have already said, we find Saints who were virgins, others who adorned the married state, and others again who, after the loss of virginity, acquired heaven as penitents. We find Saints in the highest and the lowest ranks of life. St. Henry was an emperor, St. Cunegunda an empress, St. Benedict Joseph Labré was a beggar. Some lived in the courts of princes, others in the desert. There are clerics and lay people, masters, mistresses, and servants. I do not believe that there is a trade or a profession that has not had its Saints. St. Sebastian was an officer ; St. Luke a physician ; St. Theodore a common soldier ; St. Theodot an innkeeper ; St. Isidore a farmer ; St. Crispin a shoemaker ; St. Homobon a tailor.

6. A similar grand diversity we find in the virtues of the Saints. True, all the Saints possessed all the Christian virtues—for he who is destitute of one single Christian virtue is not in the state of grace, and consequently has no true, perfect, supernatural, Christian virtue. But one has exercised himself more in this, another in that virtue, and therein arrived at distinguished perfection. St. Aloysius and St. Agnes

were characterized by their spotless purity ; St. Francis of Assisi by his love of God ; St. Francis of Sales by his meekness and humility ; St. Francis Xavier by his burning zeal for souls ; St. Vincent of Paul and St. Charles Borromeo by great love of the neighbor.

Finally, though all the blessed have been and are holy, they have not all arrived at the same degree of holiness. From the child, which immediately after Baptism entered into heaven, from the penitent sinner, who was converted only a few months before his death, to the Apostles, St. Peter and St. Paul, to the dear Mother of God (who surpasses all the Saints together in holiness and glory), what an infinite distance, what almost countless degrees of virtue !

II. *Whence comes this diversity?* This is the second question which we have to answer.

1. It arises first of all from *the will and ordinance of God*. He rules with infinite wisdom the entire universe, as well as the destiny and life of each individual. He who governs the mighty and numberless stars in their measureless orbits, regards the least grain of sand on the seashore ; and as he directs the destiny of monarchs and their realms, so he guides the life of the poorest and most despised beggar-child. There are certain most skilfully made watches which indicate not only the hour, the minute and second, but also the day of the week and month, the changes of the moon, the courses of the planets, and many other things. If you look into such a watch you see a variety of wheels, screws, points, chains. All these wheels move and work together. The artist has appointed to each its place, and each one so faithfully performs its part that the great variety goes to form one single watch, and the end of the whole is attained.

The human race and its destiny resembles such a watch or clock. Each man is a wheel or screw in the mighty machine. But whilst in the watch the artist has to do with lifeless wheels, which can not resist, but must move as their maker wills—with the clocks of the human race there is this great difference. Each wheel, that is, each man, possesses free will, and can resist his Maker—God. The divine wisdom never manifests itself more marvelous or more glorious, than when it leaves to every man his liberty, yet manages to rule all in such a manner, as to attain the end it designs, in spite of human perversity !

The providence of God appoints every man the place and task it has decreed for him. To one he gives riches, to another, poverty ; this man holds a position of importance and wide-spread influence ; another works all his life in an insignificant, lowly, and hidden sphere. So, God distributes his natural gifts. Some men he endows with great faculties and talents, and the enjoyment of an iron constitution ; oth-

ers he tries with dull, narrow faculties, a weak body and continual ill health. In like manner he distributes his supernatural gifts and favors. Shall he not give to him, whom he calls to be an apostle of nations, whom he intends to place on the pinnacle of the Church a shining light of holiness, a warning and a model to a corrupt and demoralized generation ; shall he not adorn *him* with far more extraordinary graces than the man who, as a husband or father, leads the less heroic life of an ordinary Christian ?

Hence arise an immeasurable diversity and variety of the divine gifts and graces ; and immeasurably various and diverse are, also, the blossoms and fruits of holiness, springing therefrom in hearts which place no obstacles in the way. After a storm, the sunlight sparkles upon millions and millions of rain-drops, and refracting its rays in each one, permits each to shine in its own perfect splendor of color—but all together form the beautiful rainbow. Thus the sun of divine grace shining upon the souls of the elect—strikes out from each its own peculiar splendor, of grace, virtue and glory. But all together, they form that wonderfully glorious rainbow, of which St. John speaks when he says : “ There was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald,” Apoc. (4 : 3) which unites heaven and earth, and in which the glory of God manifests itself in the most brilliant and dazzling light.

If a garden contained nothing but roses,—even though they were the finest of their kind, would the skilful gardener be perfectly satisfied ? Certainly not. The beauty of a garden consists in the number and variety of the flowers that bloom therein. This one, in color, that one, in shape, the other, in delicious fragrance,—but all beautifully grouped and arranged, for, as it were, one vast and charming flower-picture. Thus, also, the wonderful wisdom, beauty and glory of God are manifested in the inhabitants of heaven. As each of the Saints differed from the rest in his special graces and virtues, each enjoys in heaven a distinctive and characteristic splendor and glory ; but, taken all together, they harmonize so wonderfully, that they form the most beautiful and lovely flower-picture of the perfections of God.

2. I have already remarked that *God* in this arrangement *leaves every man his full liberty*. And this is the second reason of the diversity of the elect. Each one of them, making use of his free will, has profited by, and co-operated with, the grace of God, the one in a greater, the other in a less degree ; the one earlier, the other later ; the one with more, the other with less labor and heroism. Hence, one enjoys a greater, the other a less degree of felicity and glory ; the one stands nearer to the throne of God, the other farther off. It is only natural that the Blessed Virgin who co-operated with every grace,

and during her whole life preserved herself from the least stain of sin ; who most heroically practised all virtues, and ascended to the highest pinnacle of holiness, should enjoy a greater glory and felicity than an ordinary Christian, who after having lived for years in sin, corresponds at last to the grace of conversion (and, without any heroic efforts), preserves the divine favor to his death.

But if the elect enjoy, the one more, the other, less, glory and happiness, will not the less-endowed envy their more favored and fortunate companions ? Will there not be, in consequence, discontent and disunion among them ? O no ! Could they be called *the blessed ones*, if they were even for a moment discontented or envious ? Could they remain in the abode of eternal peace and holiness if they were infected even in the least with the spirit of jealousy and dissension ? Surely not. Every soul in heaven is satisfied with the felicity which it enjoys, and it envies no other. It sees that it possesses exactly that degree of glory and happiness which it has merited ; and thus, all are perfectly satisfied. Every one of the elect sincerely rejoices in the greater or less felicity of his neighbors, since God is thereby glorified. The felicity of one is the felicity of all, as a noble soul, even here below, rejoices at the good fortune of its best friend, as if it had been its own. Thus, individual happiness in heaven is doubled, trebled, and incalculably multiplied by sympathy and delight at the eternal bliss of others.

III. Having considered the diversity of the elect, as well as the reasons therefor, let us now profit by the important lessons such considerations afford us.

1. As I have already said, in spite of the great diversity of the Blessed, the most perfect union and love reign among them. Now, in every house, in every congregation, there are people of the same family, of the same race and rank who, after all, manifest the greatest diversity, not only of age, sex, and talents, but, also, of temper, disposition, inclinations, wishes, and caprices. It is often very difficult to get along with one another, to bear with one another, and to live in unity and peace. And yet, mark my words : *He who wishes to go to heaven must imitate in this the inhabitants of heaven.* Much in him as lies he must live in peace with those of his own household, and with all fellow-men. Not only the word of God, but reason, as well, teach us this. Fancy in heaven, yonder quarrelsome, rough, rude man, yonder irritable, scolding woman, who, during life, have made their homes a sort of hell for all belonging to them ! Truly, heaven would be no longer an abode of peace and joy, with such inmates as these therein ! Ah ! there are no quarrelsome, blasphemous, angry, scolding, wrang-

ling persons *there*, "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." "There shall not enter into it," says St. John, "any thing defiled." (Apoc. 21:27.) Therefore, my friend, prove yourself whether you are living peaceably and happily with the members of your own family or with those of the congregation to which you belong. Whether you do not nourish hatred and enmity, or cause strife and contention, whether you do not disturb the peace through calumny, detraction, slander, or whispering. If your conscience reproach you, do not take it too easy; have a talk about it, at least, with your pastor or confessor, repent of your sinful conduct and confess your faults; reconcile yourself, repair the scandal and the damage, and henceforth, live in unity and peace. Rather suffer, than inflict injury on others; bear and forbear; have patience with your neighbors, as they also must have patience with you. Otherwise, heaven is barred against you, and a dwelling will be prepared for you in hell, where the infernal adversary hath dwelt from the beginning, together with contention, hatred, cursing, and everlasting horror!

2. The second lesson, which I would impress upon you is: Let each one be content with his state and his circumstances, and seek therein to work out his salvation. I have told you, that among the heavenly citizens, there are representatives of all states and professions. No vocation can hinder a Christian from the attaining the holiness and perfection proper for him. All roads lead to heaven, and every man, if he so wills it, can be a saint.

3. Finally, consider well that the inhabitants of heaven now enjoy the greater glory and happiness, the more faithfully they co-operated, here below, with the grace of God. The more carefully they avoided sin, the more fervently and perfectly they discharged their duties, and the more good works they performed, the greater and more resplendent their eternal reward. Thus, also, you shall obtain a higher and brighter place in heaven, the more you labor in this world to co-operate with the grace of God, the more you endeavor to avoid sin, to discharge your duties, and perform abundant good works.

God is just; he rewards every man (1 Cor. 3:8,) according to his work. Even a cup of cold water given in the name of Jesus, shall not go unrequited. Every truly good work done in the state of grace and with a good intention shall meet its reward—but O, what kind of a reward! One that surpasses all the treasures and joys of the earth. What do not people do in order to earn a few dollars? What does not a miser do in order to increase his treasure? O labor, my brethren, in order to gain the infinitely greater reward of heaven! To this

end, strive to be always in the state of grace—for whatever you do in the state of mortal sin, is valueless for heaven, and wins you no reward. Then, make use of the opportunities which God gives you to accumulate merits for heaven. And in order to accomplish this, avail yourselves diligently of the means of grace; pray, and frequent the Sacraments from time to time; and, as often as you can, hear Mass with great attention and devotion. And should you find any difficulty, should tepidity or impatience assail you, refresh and reanimate your soul with the thought of heaven! Think of the mansions of eternal bliss, of the infinite reward which is prepared for the faithful soul in heaven; and, taking courage, push on bravely and perseveringly to the celestial goal, where he, who this day ascended into heaven, is waiting to place upon your brow the crown of everlasting glory. Amen.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

THE ERRONEOUS CONSCIENCE.

“The hour cometh when whosoever killeth you, will think that he doeth a service to God.” (John 16:2.)

That which can alone justify us before God, and make us happy in this life, is the testimony of a good conscience. “The light of thy countenance is signed upon us,” says the Psalmist; and the light is no other than that of our conscience, since it is like a lighted candle which God has placed in the midst of the hearts, so that nothing which it contains may remain hidden therein. But how is it if this light is, sometimes, an *ignis-fatuus*? “Take heed that the light which is in thee be not darkness.” (Luke 11:35.) Many, without doubt, are led astray by the erroneous light of a misguided conscience, and think they are serving God when they are, in reality, offending him. These are they of whom our Saviour says, to-day: “The hour cometh that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doeth a service to God.” (John 16:2.) Such people are really in a dangerous state, for they err and know not that they do so; the light of conscience does not enlighten, but rather blinds them. I shall, this morning, endeavor to depict the miserable condition of these unfortunate beings; and demonstrate to you,

- I. *That an erroneous conscience renders sin easy of commission; and*
- II. *That it increases the responsibility of the sinner in the eyes of God.*

May the Father of sights enlighten us that we may be able to distinguish, at all times, a false from a true light, a good conscience from a misguided one.

I. Nothing is easier than to form to one's self an erroneous conscience, because in it

1. *The understanding; and,*
2. *The will imagine to have formed what is good.*

Hence it is that even learned and pious people have many times been deluded by this false light.

Conscience is the teacher and regent of the soul which is to remind it of good, and to punish it for evil. But it sometimes happens that this teacher of the soul becomes a seducer. The Scribes and Pharisees

were continually quoting Scriptures against our Lord. They piled up sophisms and syllogisms one upon another. They could not comprehend that Christ could be greater and older than their Father Abraham. They held fast to their Law, and supposed it was impossible for them to err if they observed it strictly ; but the words of the prophet Isaías were fulfilled in their regard ;—“They have not known nor understood ;” for their eyes are covered that they may not see and that they may not understand with their heart ;” (Is. 44: 18) and therefore, “they are all gone aside, they are become unprofitable together.” (Ps. 13: 3.) The source of their error was in their wilfully refusing to bend to the truth, rather wishing to bend the truth to suit themselves.

2. That which self-will effects in the learned is sometimes produced in pious people by self-love. They frequently imagine they are seeking God when, in reality, they are seeking themselves. Beloved brethren, behold the rock that you should carefully avoid. And if the pious are scarcely secure against this danger, how much more reason have the tepid and the wicked to fear ? How often do we not endeavor to hide sin under the cloak of virtue ? How often do not pride and love of dress conceal themselves under the mask of decorum and necessity ? How frequently, too, the most dangerous pleasures under the garb of friendship and civility ! And what will not one do when conscience excuses and condones his vice ? Behold what the Jews have done under the direction of an erroneous conscience ? They crucified the Redeemer of the world, and thought they were doing a service to God ! They committed the greatest crime, and considered that they were only showing their zeal for the observance of the law. I ask you yourselves, my beloved Christians, how often have you not supposed you had done good, when you found afterward it was evil ! The worst of this condition is that in it one commits sin quite calmly and tranquilly. A murderer, an adulterer, a highway robber, knows that he sins, and this knowledge may lead him back again in humble repentance to the feet of God, but the tranquillity of an erroneous conscience never awakens the sinner to the enormity of his sins.

II. But does, perhaps, the erroneous conscience excuse the sinner before God ? No ; for

1. *He could ;* and,
2. *He should have known right from wrong.*

1. Opportunities are never lacking by which one may arrive at the knowledge of his duties, and distinguish right from wrong. For this

purpose, we have, in general, the Church, the Bible, the books of the Holy Fathers, the writings of theologians. In particular our duties are defined and explained from the pulpit, in the confessional and in the special instructions of those who are charged with the care of souls. He who can say with the Psalmist, "I have sworn and am determined to keep the judgments of thy justice," (Ps. 118: 106) should remember what precedes it; "thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my paths." (Ps. 118: 105.) No one can excuse himself and say, "I was not able to see." (Ps. 39: 13.) But how is it if this blindness is a punishment of sin, and the possessor of an erroneous conscience is already of the number of those unfortunates of whom the Wise Man has written:—"These things they thought, and were deceived, for their own malice blinded them." (Wis. 2: 21.)

2. There are many things which one should know, but does not know, either through carelessness to know, or through sloth to learn, or pride to inquire.—(St. Bernard.) Many have not a real knowledge of their sins, because they do not examine their consciences thoroughly. Others too are slothful, and will not attend at sermons, or instructions in Christian doctrine. Others, again, are ashamed to learn what they do not know. If then, through ignorance of essential matters, an erroneous conscience is formed, what can excuse these thoughtless, idle or bashful people? In such sinners, ignorance and malice are always found associated together. The Jews did not know that Christ was the promised Messiah "for if they had known it, they would never have crucified him." (1 Cor. 2: 8.) But are they on this account less guilty? Could they not, and should they not, have known it?

We are now convinced, my dearly beloved, what great damage an erroneous conscience may cause. If we be Christians, we shall immediately bestir ourselves, regulating our actions according to the sound rules of a true conscience. It is in our own hands to possess a true or an erroneous conscience. We can, and should know, our duty; and since we fail so easily in this point, let us endeavor to free ourselves from self-will and self-love, otherwise, we may frequently consider as zeal what is in reality a grave fault or defect. If we do this, we may say confidently with the Apostles: "Our glory is this, the testimony of our conscience." A testimony which does not come from the conscience but from on high for "not he that commendeth himself is approved, but he whom God commendeth." (2 Cor. 10: 18.) A testimony which our conscience does not give us, but by which we clearly recognize it as originating from God, and proving us to be the true sons of our heavenly Father, co-heirs with the Light and Life of the world! Amen.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

WHY THE WORLD CONTINUALLY PERSECUTES THE CHURCH.

“And these things they will do you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things I have told you; that when the hour of them shall come, you may remember that I told you.” (John 15: 3, 4.)

From the fulfillment of this prophecy it is manifest that he who made it foresaw the future. It has been accomplished in the Apostles, whose struggles and sufferings St. Paul thus describes: “God hath set forth us Apostles, the last, as it were, men destinat-ed to death; because we are made a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men. . . . We are made as the refuse of this world, the offscour-ing of all even till now.” (1 Cor. 4: 9-13.) This prophecy was not intended merely for the Apostles, but for the entire Church in all ages. And it has been fulfilled through all the centuries of her existence, from the bloody persecutions of the first ages up to the infernal machinations of our own days. But what is the reason of this uninterrupted persecution? Not to mention that in the providence of God the truth and glory of the Church are, thus manifested, I assign the following motives:

- I. *The Church is not a child of the world;*
- II. *She combats the maxims of the world; and*
- III. *She cannot be crushed by the world.*

I. *The Church is not a Child of the World; Her Orgin is from above.*

1. The world does not antagonize the Church because it believes her deserving of hatred. For what crimes has this daughter of heaven committed? To her, the words descriptive of her Bridegroom rightly apply: “He went about doing good, and healing all. . . . For God was with him.” (Acts. 10: 38.) Even from a temporal point of view, the Church is the greatest benefactress of mankind. “If it had not been for the Church, Europe would have become a prey to the tyranny of despots, the theater of perpetual wars, or a wilderness for the Moguls.” (Words of Herder, a Protestant.)

2. The true motive of the world’s warfare against the Church is,

because she is not one of its own. Like her divine Master, she descended to us from a better world ; and hence, endowed with a spirit opposed to the spirit of the world. (John 15: 18, 19.) "If the world hate you, know ye that it hated me before you. If you had been of the world, the world would love its own ; but because you have not been of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore, the world hateth you." The world persecuted our Saviour, in his tender infancy, and in his manhood, and after many outrages and insults finally crucified Him. "The servant is not greater than his lord."

3. On this account, the spirit of the world is bitterly opposed to that of the Church.

a. St. John has explained the spirit of the world in these few words : "If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life ; which is not of the Father, but is of the world." (1 John 2: 15, 16.) These are the three filthy and poisonous sources from which all the desires of worldlings originate.

b. The Church exhorts her children, if they wish to be living members of the sacred body of Jesus Christ, not to yield to the concupiscence of the flesh, nor attach their hearts to perishable things, but to conquer pride by ready obedience to God and his representatives on earth.

4. Therefore, the world will always be hostile to the Church. Charity or friendship cannot exist between persons of opposite spirit and pursuits. "We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Gentiles foolishness, but to them that are called * * the power of God, and the wisdom of God." (1 Cor. 1: 23, 24.) In this sense, we understand the words of our Saviour : "Do not think that I am come to send peace upon earth ; I came not to send peace, but the sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." (Matt. 10: 34-36.)

5. From this it follows :

That a reconciliation between the world and Christ cannot be affected but by compromise or a radical change of sentiments. Either the world must cease to be the world, or the Church must cease to be the Church. Since neither contingency will ever arise, they will continue enemies until the consummation of the world.

This combat will grow the fiercer, the more the world endeavors to

accomplish its wicked designs. Hence the present warfare that is waged against the Church all over the universe, and hence men ridicule the stern demands of the Church and represent them as incompatible with the weakness of human nature. If the Church would renounce her mysteries ; if she would only release men from the obligation of obeying spiritual superiors, confessing sins, hearing Mass, fasting, etc., the world would soon be reconciled to her. If you, my beloved, are hated on account of your Christian life, "rejoice and be exceeding glad, because your reward is very great in heaven." (Matt. 5: 12.)

II. *The Church combats the maxims of the world.*

1. The Church appears before the world with the intention of imposing upon men *the sweet yoke of Jesus Christ*. She appears in obedience to the word of Jesus Christ, who said : "All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations ; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost ; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you : and behold, I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world." (Matt. 28 : 18-20). "Amen, I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven ; and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven." (Matt. 18 : 18.) Is it surprising that the world should rise up against this claim of the Church, and the authority of her Founder, in the language of those rebellious citizens in the Gospel parable : "We will not have this man to reign over us ?"—(Luke 19 : 14).

2. To all men without exception, whatever their state of life, the Church repeats *the demands of her Lord and Master*. She says with St. John to the *kings* and *mighty ones* of the earth : "Is it not lawful for thee" (Matt. 14 : 4) ; and to their *subjects*, she says with the Apostle : "Fear God, honor the king." (1 Pet. 2 : 17). She says to the *rich* : "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 19 : 24.) She restrains the *poor* from violence, consoling them by the assertion of Jesus, that Lazarus, for having patiently borne his sufferings, was carried by the holy Angels into Abraham's bosom. To the *proud*, she says : "Unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." She threatens *all sinners* with everlasting punishment. Now, man's nature is such that he feels indignant under reproach and correction. "You received me as an *angel of God*, even as Christ Jesus," wrote St. Paul to the Galatians ; "where is then your blessedness ? For, I bear you witness, that if it could be done, you would have plucked out your own eyes, and would

have given them to me. Am I then become your enemy in telling you the truth?" The great affection these people entertained for the Apostle, vanished as soon as he uttered to them a word of reproach.—Such is the fate of the Church.

3. The world in its assaults upon the Church *is aided by the devil*, the prince of the world, who trembles for his continued dominion. "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time!" (Matt. 8: 29.) Thus the devils, crying out, bore testimony to the power and glory of the Lord. Satan, knowing the power and glory of the Church, as well, uses every effort to maintain his dominion, by carrying on against her a ceaseless warfare.

Do not by a sinful life and an unchristian conduct wage war against your Holy Mother, the Church, lest your passions change you from children into enemies of the Bride of Christ.

III. *The Church can not be conquered by the world.*

Generous combatants will never make use of *ignoble weapons*. The world, in its assaults upon the Church, employs the base weapons of misrepresentation, calumny, and brutal force.—Historical lies about the lives of the Popes, St. Bartholomew's Night ;—false expositions of her doctrines,—calumnies against her dignitaries and religious institutions, etc.,—what is the explanation of this bitter opposition, of these dishonorable measures? It is because her enemies know by an experience of eighteen centuries, that the Church has always been victorious. And instead of recognizing therein the finger of God, they become only the more infuriated against her. Her strength and beauty, however, have only been renewed and increased by the atrocious cruelty of the Jews, the bloody persecution of the Gentiles, the schisms and heresies of faithless children, the pretensions of kings and emperors.

1. The beautiful life of Joseph of Egypt is a true figure of the life of the Church. "Israel loved Joseph above all his sons, because he had him in his old age ; and he made him a coat of divers colors. And his brethren, seeing that he was loved by his father more than all his sons, hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him." Behold the Church and the world? The Church being loved by God as his bride and mystical body, being arrayed in the most resplendent garment of his grace, is hated by the children of the world.

2. By wonderful visions the Lord revealed the future glory of his beloved Joseph, whence, his brothers hated him the more. "Behold,

the dreamer cometh. Come, let us kill him, and cast him into some old pit." And they would actually have effected their wicked purpose, but for the exertions of Judas, his brother. The doctrines of our Church and the promises made to her by her divine Founder, are mere idle dreams in the eyes of the world, and to prove them such—if it were possible—she shrinks from no cruelty. Yet the protecting brother has never yet been wanting.

3. After many trials, Joseph was received into the court of the king. (Gen. 41: 42). At last, his brethren, being on the point of starvation, turned to him for aid, and he saved them from death. When miseries and calamities overwhelm the nations in punishment of their crimes, the Church is once more acknowledged and praised as the refuge and salvation of mankind.

We have good reason to look confidently forward to the future. The greater the persecutions, the greater their benefits and blessings. "As only the woman of Cana touched our Lord, whilst the multitude pressed against him, so the Church is pressed by many, touched by few." (St. Augustine). Always side with the Church, and out of the struggles and trials of this life she will lead us by a glorious victory, to the imperishable joys of the eternal kingdom.

BISHOP EHRLER.

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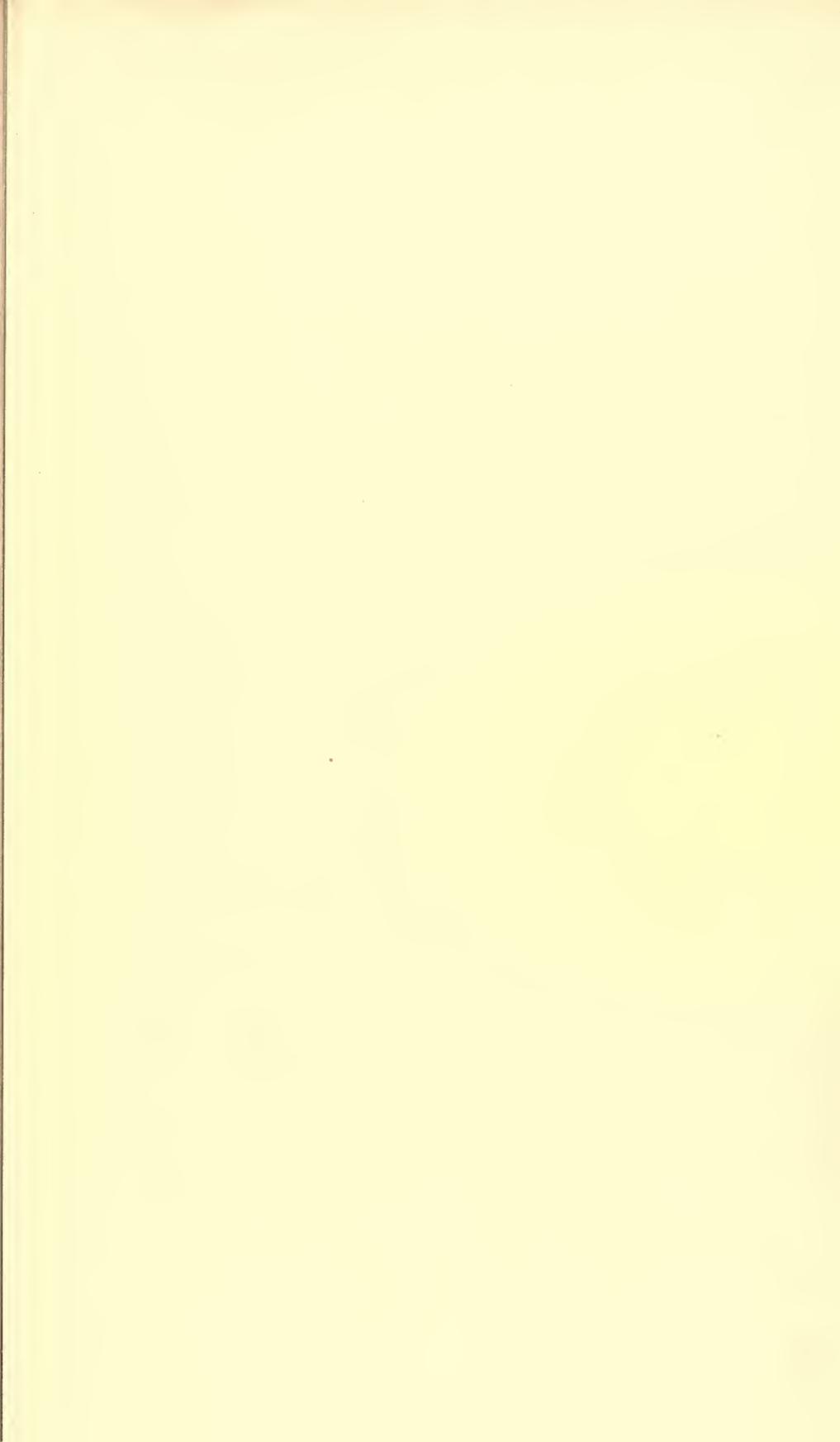
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